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MR. WARRENNE :

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CHAPTER XXX.

LOVE AND PHILOSOPHY.

EARLY in the autumn Alice and Captain Scudamore were married. Nothing could be simpler than the preparations—nothing quieter than the wedding. It was arranged that the young people should live at the Woodlands, and Mrs. Thorne promised to continue her superintendence of everything both in and out of doors.

Maud did not feel the parting with her sister as much as all the neighbours agreed that she would. It was hardly a separation. They met almost every day, and if it were too rainy for Alice and Maud to meet, Dick was sure to be sent to Erlsmede with some message to Mr. Warrenne or his daughter. Now that the great occupation of attending to Alice was withdrawn from her, Maud found more time to attend to herself; she read more, she played more; she improved herself in sketching; she was a great deal with Mrs. Creswick, whose society was always improving, and she felt, to her great delight, that she was more and more indispensable to her father's comfort every day. And the beautiful little Lyles were at the Ferns during their mother's absence abroad, and they held her company during the morning, while her father was out on his rounds. There was not a corner in Mr. Warrenne's house, not a nook of his garden that they did not know perfectly well. Karl was never at all surprised to see them come into the stable to pat the white horse, nor did the cook take it amiss when they found their way into the kitchen to ask for a bit of bread to feed the birds, or a draught of milk for themselves. There was a sense of liberty as soon as they got within the Warrennes' gate, which they could never quite feel before the stately Mrs. Creswick.

There was but one little drawback in the mind of Maud—she was very sensitive and a little jealous, and it was rather a trial to her to see that, for the first time in her life, she was not the first object with Mr. Scudamore. As she had said to him, she was quite willing that Dick should prefer her sister, but she did not care that *he* should like Alice better than herself. But it seemed to be a trial at the Woodlands between Captain Scudamore, his father, and Mrs. Thorne, which should spoil Alice the most completely. Mr. Scudamore and Mrs. Thorne doted on Alice because she had been the means of retaining Dick in England, and it is difficult to say which felt the most grateful to her for this piece of service.

Maud was sincerely rejoiced to find that month succeeded month and Captain Scudamore's attachment to her sister was as warm as ever. She had shared some of her father's misgivings on this subject. Nobody could doubt how ardent was his devotion to Alice before marriage; but she glanced with some dismay at the future. She had feared, with her father, that he might find his home monotonous, and gradually seek his pleasure elsewhere.

But the Woodlands was a home which might have contented a more fastidious person than Captain Scudamore. The house was excellent—more like an old manor-house than a farm, with its deep stone porch and large casement windows. It was beautifully situated, and as the property belonged to Mr. Scudamore, he had felt an interest in improving the woods and fields in appearance as well as in value. Broad belts of beech and hazel divided his fields, and screened the hills behind his house; and along these hedgerows Dick and Alice might be seen to wander, as the spring came on, gathering primroses and violets, very much like two lovers, although they had been married nearly six months. Mrs. Thorne fulfilled her promise of taking all the household cares off Alice: she accomplished her task with a great deal of bustle and boasting, it is true, but also with much skill and economy.

But one duty which had devolved on Alice since her marriage, Mrs. Thorne made no attempt to appropriate to herself. She could not avoid going more into society. Mr. Scudamore was much liked and respected by his neighbours, and everybody called upon her and invited her. She was obliged to return these visits with her husband. In this way she came to know numbers of people who had never troubled themselves about her as Alice Warrenne, and who knew nothing at all about Maud. It surprised her very much to find herself so completely taking precedence of her sister, but it did her no harm. She was as simple and modest, and as anxious to escape from notice, as she had ever been.

Maud was all the better for this alteration in affairs. With her quick intelligent mind, she had been everything to Alice, and she had felt her importance and usefulness. It gave her a feeling of self-reliance and decision, which, with her youth and beauty, was

rather engaging, but which might have been carried too far. She learned a useful lesson in finding that people could do as well without her as with her—it softened her estimate of herself. Mrs. Creswick used, inwardly, to hope that circumstances might work as favourable a change in her niece Florence. It was rather a favourite topic of hers, the use of circumstances in forming character, and the importance of not neglecting or perverting so valuable a means. Maud had the advantage of being able to discuss her feelings openly with Mrs. Creswick—and on this subject she could speak freely and without any bitterness. She felt that although not so much wanted, she was as well loved as ever by her sister, and that she had lost nothing, though Alice had gained in Mr. Scudamore's regard.

"I am anxious about Florence," said Mrs. Creswick, one morning as they were walking together in the garden at the Ferns; "she writes in bad spirits, and evidently in very poor health. My brother does not notice it, but at present he is so wrapped up in his infant son that he has no thoughts to spare for any one else."

"You are expecting them home soon, are you not?" asked Maud.

"Yes, in a few weeks; Mr. Reynolds wishes to purchase Heathfields, which is now for sale; and he ought to be here to conduct the affair himself."

"It is a fine place," said Maud, "and very near to Forrel Court."

"Ah! you can tell me how Mrs. Digby is," said Mrs. Creswick.

"She grows weaker every day," said Maud, sadly. "Papa fears she will not live through this month."

"A very interesting and very peculiar person," remarked Mrs. Creswick.

"Very much so," said Maud; "when, you know, she became acquainted with Leonard from that terrible accident, she would not let papa introduce Alice and me to her, though she often asked him about us. She said she felt that she had not long to live, and it was not worth while for either party to form an acquaintance that must so soon be broken. But we were saying something about Miss Reynolds."

"It is a great change for Florence," said Mrs. Creswick. "She had so entirely depended on being the mistress of her father's house, that it would require more philosophy than she possesses to bear his marriage with composure or indifference."

"But I should think it was *now* a matter of very little consequence to her," said Maud, "since I understand that she is shortly to leave her father's house for a house of her own."

"Yes, her marriage is to take place as soon as possible after her return," said Mrs. Creswick; "my friend, Mr. Courtenay, has borne her absence with exemplary patience; but there is now no reason for delay."

"People are surprised at almost every match that takes place," said Maud; "and therefore it is not a very new remark to say that I was surprised when I heard of this one."

"And why, my dear?" asked Mrs. Creswick, smiling.

"Because, from what I recollect of Mr. Courtenay, I should imagine that he would be very exacting in his choice of a wife; and Miss Reynolds was thought to be—rather—a flirt."

"I wish I could defend the best and most sensible men in their selection of a wife," said Mrs. Creswick. "Indeed, it can hardly be called a *choice*, so completely are they at the mercy of the first pretty face and engaging manner that comes in their way. But I am afraid Mr. Courtenay is wholly without defence; for I imagine his engagement to have been simply the result of pique."

"Of pique, my dear Mrs. Creswick? That is very bad! That gives me a low idea of his character!" said Maud, stooping to gather a wild hyacinth that sprang up among the moss which carpeted the secluded walk which they were pacing.

"I admit that it is wrong," said Mrs. Creswick; "but he is so great a favourite of mine, that I won't allow it to be low."

"Oh, Mrs. Creswick!" said Maud, "how poor a love must that be which can turn to pique! and how low a sense of justice must he have to vent his spite, not on the woman who has refused him (there would be some sense in that), but upon the woman who is credulous enough to believe that he speaks the truth—that his attentions are an earnest tribute to her merits, instead of a pitiful mortification at the indifference of another! I have a very shabby opinion of men; there's hardly one of them, however just in his dealings to his own sex, who would not lie like a coward to a woman! And I have a very base, pitiful idea, I can tell you, of this Mr. Courtenay!"

"Of course," said Mrs. Creswick, smiling at her young friend's vehemence, "you have a whole crowd of exceptions to that little statement of yours."

"Oh, yes! For instance, papa—and the Scudamores. I think that Dick—though you will understand me when I say that he is not at all the kind of person I envy Alice in having for a husband—is a plain-dealing, warm-hearted man, who could not, for it is not in his nature, swerve by one hair's breadth from the truth in any statement that he might make to any one, man or woman!"

"And you think that if a man makes an offer on any ground but that of love, he is guilty of an act of treachery?"

"The very basest!" exclaimed Maud. "He has no right to marry with any other feeling. You may *esteem* a friend—you may *regard* a neighbour—you may be *kind* to any one in distress, but these feelings are wholly insufficient to make such a tie as marriage sacred or even respectable! Not that I believe in all that nonsense," she added, turning to gather a piece of sweetbriar as she spoke, "except perhaps in the case of Alice and Dick."

"What shall we do to make you alter your opinion?" said Mrs. Creswick, laughing.

"Do you remember Shakespeare's beautiful lines?" continued Maud :

" . . . Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove."

"Such a sentiment as that is worth accepting. No pique could induce a man to transfer such homage as that to another person! I think," she added, little imagining how near she was to the truth, "that if Leonard were to love, it would be after that fashion."

"That is the very finest of his sonnets," said Mrs. Creswick. "But sometimes, when I have doubted whether an idea is quite rational, I have amused myself by carrying it on a little farther; and if it then becomes absurd, I feel convinced that the first thought is unreasonable. Now I met with a sentence this morning in a little work of Balzac's, which is merely an exaggeration of the lines you have repeated. I don't often read or quote French authors, but as near as I can recollect the passage runs thus :

"L'amour, Madame la Duchesse, ce n'est pas d'aimer une noble femme, une Clarisse; le bel effort, ma foi! L'amour c'est de se dire, 'Celle que j'aime est une infâme, elle me trompe, elle me trompera, c'est une rouée; et d'y courir, et d'y trouver le bleu de l'éther, les fleurs du paradis—'"

"Oh, that is shocking!" said Maud. "Where a woman is unworthy it is contemptible of a man to persist in loving her. If Mr. Courtenay had this excuse for his pique, I acquit him. Ah! here come the children," she said, running forward to meet them. "Look, darlings! there is the postman at the green gates: now, a race to see which will get Aunt Creswick's letters!"

The two children set off down the gravel walk, and presently returned, Lucy with the letters, and Edward with a couple of newspapers.

"Good news, my dears!" said Mrs. Creswick, looking up from the letter she was reading; "papa and mamma are on their road home; they expect to be here about the end of the month."

The children raised their eyes to Mrs. Creswick's face, then turned uneasily to Maud, then looked at each other.

"Are *you* glad, Lucy?" said Edward, spreading out his fingers in the restless way children have when they are not comfortable.

"Oh, yes!" sighed Lucy.

"A dear little new brother coming home too, for you to play with," said Mrs. Creswick.

Lucy's eyes sparkled. "That will be nice," she said.

Edward hesitated. "There's Karl, and Undine, and the white horse," he said, as if trying to balance the two attractions.

"And the two new calves at the Woodlands," said Lucy.

"And Alice's tame pigeons," said Edward.

"Oh! and the guinea-pigs Dick bought her!" cried Lucy.

"And the young rabbits," said Edward.

"No, I'm not glad," said Lucy, taking firm hold of Maud's dress.

"How I wish they always lived with me!" said Maud, snatching her up, and covering her with kisses.

"Papa and mamma will be very glad to see their little ones again," said Mrs. Creswick.

"And so will they be glad when the time comes, naughty things," said Maud, caressing them.

"We must not expect too much from the affection of children," said Mrs. Creswick, when the little ones were at a distance with their hoops; "they live in the present, and the tame rabbits here would carry it against the little brother in Italy at any time. But we were talking about Florence and Mr. Courtenay."

"So we were," said Maud; "I was quarrelling with his pique, you know. But no doubt the match is agreeable to you, as you like him so much."

"As regards Florence, I rejoice," said Mrs. Creswick; "I never thought she would have married a superior man, for that I consider him, in spite of this one error of judgment. I think he will raise her character, and be watchful over her conduct; and in doing so is more likely to secure her lasting self-respect and happiness than if she married a man who fell in love with her beauty, and afterwards wearied of her levity and caprice."

"And with regard to *his* happiness?" said Maud.

"Florence is improving," said Mrs. Creswick; "her letters show that she is becoming more conscientious and more humble; she will feel, I hope, when she marries, that it is her duty to secure the esteem and attachment of her husband by every means in her power. They may go on smoothly together; and with regard to happiness, my dear Maud, this world is not its abode; and at my age I have seen so many fair prospects clouded, and so many love matches turn to discontent and misery, that I almost begin to think, with *Mrs. Malaprop*, that in matrimony it is safest to set out with a little aversion!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

PICKING COWSLIPS.

THE next morning Mr. Warrenne was summoned to see Mrs. Digby, who was seriously ill. As he was not likely to be home in time for church, he dropped Maud at the Woodlands, that she might accompany her sister and the Scudamores. She found Alice standing at the window of the breakfast-room, feeding her tame pigeons, which were clustered on the window-sill. Captain Scudamore, standing

beside her, was holding some peas in his hand, which she took one by one, and offered to her favourites.

As soon as Alice heard her sister's voice she turned quickly round and ran to meet her.

"Take care! Bless my heart! You will run up against the table!" exclaimed Captain Scudamore, catching hold of her, and letting the peas fall to the ground.

The pigeons, scared by this sudden movement, rose from the window-sill into the air with a rushing sound, and after wheeling round two or three times dropped one by one into their old places again.

Mrs. Thorne, who was reading a large black-letter Bible at the carved walnut-tree table, looked up. "Hollo! what's that little hum-bug about now?" she asked.

"She is always getting into mischief," said Captain Scudamore, as he shook hands with Maud. "She had quite an adventure yesterday."

"Yes; quite an adventure!" said Alice, laughing.

"What was it?" asked Maud.

"You know the pond in the field at the bottom of the garden?" said Captain Scudamore.

"Dear Alice—the pond!" cried Maud in terror.

"Yes," said Alice, putting aside Captain Scudamore with her little hand, and advancing eagerly to tell the story herself. "I heard Dick's voice in the field, and I went through the garden to meet him; but you know the descent to the pond is very gradual on the side nearest the house, and I missed my way, and got down among the osiers, and into the water. I was so frightened when I felt the wet; but I called to Dick, and he soon came to me."

"And a pretty couple of geese you looked!" said Mrs. Thorne. "Dick as pale as a sheet, and you with your teeth chattering, and your clothes all drenched."

"I have had a railing put up round the pond," said Captain Scudamore; "I should have thought of it before."

"I don't see that," said Mrs. Thorne; "if the child had done as she was bid, and not gone beyond the garden, she would have run into no danger."

"Ah! but she never does as she is bid," said Captain Scudamore, smiling at her.

"Who has the old man got with him, Dick?" asked Mrs. Thorne, looking through the window.

She used this designation when speaking of her brother, to distinguish him from his son.

"Sir Frederic Manning," replied Captain Scudamore.

"Hem! he comes here after Alice," replied Mrs. Thorne.

"What nonsense!" said Captain Scudamore; "he comes here solely because he has nothing to do."

"Hollo! Queen Maud here?" exclaimed Mr. Scudamore, as he entered; "this is capital; this is just the thing; you will come back and dine with us. Oh, yes, you must! Sir Frederic, this is Miss Warrenne, my little girl's sister, you know."

Sir Frederic, after speaking to the others, stared very hard at Maud, and then said:

"You are extremely like your brother."

"Well, I believe I am," replied Maud; then turning to Mr. Scudamore, who was dropping some beautiful double violets one by one into Alice's hand, she said, "Save some for me, grandfather."

Mr. Scudamore held a few out to her, and as she approached to take them, he whispered, "Now's your time, Queen Maud—a handsome young baronet that any one would say was made on purpose for you—and the coast clear, too—not another pretty woman within twenty miles, except little Alice, and she's not to be had. I know you had him in your eye when you refused Dick!"

"In the first place, grandfather," said she, crimsoning with anger, "I did *not* refuse Dick; and in the next, let me remind you, this is very pretty conversation for Sunday morning!"

"Well, when do you go to Rome again?" asked Mrs. Thorne of Sir Frederic.

"Never, I hope," said Sir Frederic; "I have accomplished my errand there—and I never was so tired of a place in my life—I stayed there three months."

"And what did you go for, Sir Frederic?" asked Alice, simply.

"That's a stupid question, little one!" said Mrs. Thorne; "you don't suppose he will tell *you* what took him there."

"Yes, I will," returned Sir Frederic; "I went to have a statue made for me."

"And did it satisfy you?" asked Alice.

"Oh, yes—perfectly."

"There, that will do," said Mrs. Thorne, "don't ask him any more—he will only fib and fib—it is quite awful to hear him; let it be a statue if he likes—we don't believe him a bit the more for——"

"But, Mrs. Thorne, upon my honour, I went to have a statue executed under my directions!" exclaimed Sir Frederic, with great vehemence. "The sculptor lived in Rome, and I could not describe what I wanted by letter, I declare!"

"Ah! ah! that will do," interrupted Mrs. Thorne. "Lived in Rome, did he?—a great many people live in Rome, as I said to Frank Barton."

"But, Mrs. Thorne," persisted Sir Frederic, "I protest you may see it any day at my house."

"Yes—make me believe you trotted over to Rome to get a statue of Julius Cæsar—I suppose you galloped to Stuttgart on the same errand last autumn twelvemonth, to get a statue made of Mademoiselle Mohr?"

"Upon my word, Mrs. Thorne!" cried Sir Frederic, really growing angry.

"Hush! that's a good man; don't let us talk before all these young people of such matters," said Mrs. Thorne, her eyes twinkling with enjoyment. "I'll come and see your Julius Cæsar one of these days."

"Well, we are going to church, some of us," said Captain Scudamore.

"I don't care if I go with you," said Sir Frederic.

"Do," said Mr. Scudamore. "I say, Queen Maud," he added, "I'll see and make him give you his arm."

"And I won't take it, I warn you, grandfather!" said Maud.

"I suppose you are not going, you wicked old woman?" said Mr. Scudamore, addressing his sister.

"Not I! What should I do there?" exclaimed Mrs. Thorne, thumping the black-letter Bible with her fist. "*This* is my church! I don't believe a word old Ranger says. Tells you not to use your horses on Sunday, and rides home in his own carriage! There are your parsons! But he is a good-looking man, and the women are all on his side. Eh, Mrs. Maud?"

"I am sure I wish him all sorts of good," said Maud, laughing. "His best friends can't oftener wish him a stall in C—— Cathedral than I do!"

"A stall! A tombstone, you mean!" said Mrs. Thorne.

"No, indeed," said Maud; "I think he would make a beautiful Prebend."

"Dick takes Alice, of course," said Mr. Scudamore, glancing at Sir Frederic.

"Then the least you can do, grandfather, is to take care of *me*," said Maud, slipping her hand into Mr. Scudamore's arm and pressing her little prayer-book upon him.

"I tell you what, Queen Maud, there must be an end one day to this sort of thing, you know," said Mr. Scudamore, in a doleful tone. "It can't go on for ever—I am sure I do all I can for you—but you are so perverse!"

"Then how light your conscience must feel, dear grandfather," returned Maud, "and what a pleasant reflection that is on a Sunday morning!"

"A fine-looking man, with a fine estate, and as kind-hearted a fellow as ever lived," said Mr. Scudamore, as they passed out of the gate; Sir Frederic being a little in advance, with Captain Scudamore and Alice.

"Since he is just out of hearing, grandfather, I may remark that I think him a very ordinary-looking man; that I know his estate is mortgaged and embarrassed in a shameful manner; shameful because it is owing to his own extravagance, and I wonder at you for recommending to me a person who crowns all his virtues by the exemplary one of hard drinking!"

"Well ; I don't say he is as good-looking as Dick, for example," said Mr. Scudamore.

"I should think not," retorted Maud. "Secondly——?"

"Well, secondly ; I don't think a little extravagance a crying sin in a young man who, if he had a motive—that is a wife, Queen Maud—would very soon turn over a new leaf."

"Ah, so you think ! Go on," said Maud.

"And as for his drinking, I don't believe a word of it ; perhaps when he was a younger man he may have now and then taken a little too much. But *I* never saw him drunk, and I know his habits are sober, Queen Maud—and I speak of everybody as I find them !"

"What a profoundly wise plan that is," said Maud, "to judge of others, not as they are, but as they appear to you ! There are some cases, Mr. Scudamore, in which it is wiser to believe what you hear than what you see."

"Well, I'll tell you, Queen Maud, why people say so much against him," continued Mr. Scudamore ; "because he does not fawn upon them, and is, perhaps, a little blunt and eccentric in his conduct, and because all the old dowagers in the county can make nothing of him for their daughters !"

"Bravo, grandfather !" returned Maud. "And now perhaps you can tell me what the text was last Sunday morning ?"

"And when will you come to see my new statue, Mrs. Scudamore ?" asked Sir Frederic.

"Whenever Dick will take me," replied Alice.

"Oh, he is an idle man ! He can bring you any day—say to-morrow ?"

"Well, to-morrow—provided it will not hurt your statue for me to touch it, for that is my only way of seeing, you know."

"You shall do what you please with it ! And when are we to have our famous cowslip gathering ?"

"Oh, very soon ! you are to come to us for that, you know."

"I shall not forget it. I have pledged myself to Mrs. Thorne for some time past."

"How soon, Dick, will they be fit to gather ?" asked Alice.

"In a week or ten days ; there is one just blown !"

"Get it for me, Dick."

Captain Scudamore stopped to gather the cowslip, and Mr. Scudamore and Maud joined them.

"Where is your brother now, Miss Warrenne ?" asked Sir Frederic.

"At Damascus," said Maud ; "he is making a collection of inlaid weapons."

"Rather an expensive taste," said Captain Scudamore.

"He has the *de quoi*," replied Maud, smiling to herself.

"I should like to know how," remarked Mr. Scudamore.

"You will know one day, grandfather," said Maud.

"And very soon, I am afraid," added Alice, who knew that Mrs. Digby was dangerously ill.

"Here's a mystery," said Mr. Scudamore; "I should like to get to the bottom of it!"

"How curious the grandfather is!" said Maud.

"And I would not even tell Dick!" said Alice.

"I should like to go to Damascus; it is singular that I have never been in Syria!" said Sir Frederic. "I might start next week. Let me see; the packets for Alexandria leave on the——"

"Now, can you not let Damascus alone, and sit down quietly at the Manor-house?" said Mr. Scudamore.

"What to do?" asked Sir Frederic.

"Why, at your time of life you ought to be married and settled!" said Mr. Scudamore.

"Married! *la belle avance!*" returned Sir Frederic. "I can't afford it!"

"If you marry an heiress," said Alice, thinking she had found a complete solution to the difficulty.

"I have declared against that, absolutely, Mrs. Scudamore," returned Sir Frederic.

"And what an inviting prospect for any one who has it in his power to travel," exclaimed Maud, "to be told to sit down *quietly* at the Manor-house!"

"Then in my place, Miss Warrenne," said Sir Frederic, "you would——"

"Look out for the next packet to Alexandria," replied Maud.

"What, before the cowslips are gathered?" asked Alice.

They all laughed.

"Come, come; we are going to church—be serious," said Maud.

"Yes, we will; but you should not persuade Sir Frederic," said Alice.

"No; you should not persuade Sir Frederic, you viper!" said Mr. Scudamore, in a low tone.

"I know, grandfather, you call me names when you are most pleased with me," said Maud, smilingly.

"And, seriously, I will not start before I have gathered the cowslips," said Sir Frederic.

"That is right," replied Alice.

They went into the church—Mr. Scudamore still shaking his head to himself at Maud's delinquencies. As there was no room for Sir Frederic in the Scudamores' pew, he went into the next seat. This looked odd, because he had a large pew of his own at the other side of the church, fitted up with red velvet hassocks and arm-chairs. But he had very seldom made use of it, because until he had become intimate with the Scudamores, his visits to church had been few and far between; and when he had accompanied them of late, he had

always taken the place in their pew which Maud occupied. Mrs. Stapylton, who entered at the head of her four daughters, looked maliciously at him, for she feared he was attaching himself to Alice—and she remarked to Albina (the one destined for Sir Frederic) that an attachment to a married woman was always unluckily more difficult to counteract than one for a single girl, and that she had great claims upon her daughter's gratitude for the exertions she intended to make in her behalf.

And when they stood up for the morning hymn, and Alice and Maud were joining reverently in the service, I am sorry to say that Mrs. Stapylton was gazing into the red velvet pew, and picturing to herself Albina throned in the right-hand arm-chair, and Sir Frederic in the left; and Mr. Scudamore's eyes travelled in the same direction, and then came back to Maud with a woeful expression, as if he felt quite sure that, however hard he might work in her behalf, she would obstinately counteract all his endeavours. It happened that the first lesson was from the beautiful book of Ruth; and Sir Frederic, after listening to a few words, rather impatiently rose, and leaning over to Captain Scudamore, whispered:

"I say, Scudamore, tell your wife that my statue is taken from that chapter."

"Your statue!" said Captain Scudamore.

"Ruth, gleaning," replied Sir Frederic; and then he sat down contentedly again.

"Oh! I thought it was Julius Cæsar," remarked Alice, when her husband had given her this piece of information, and then, forgetting the statue, she directed her attention to Mr. Ranger.

"How I wonder what he had to say to Captain Scudamore in the middle of the service!" said Mrs. Stapylton to her eldest daughter as they left the church.

"I would give the world to know, mamma!" returned Miss Albina; "it did look so very odd!"

Miss Emily, who was in love with a cornet of Dragoons, and Miss Sarah, who was trying for the curate at Forrel, and Miss Laura, who was a romp, and cared for nobody, quickened their steps the moment they heard this subject started.

"Make haste, for goodness sake, if you don't want to be bored to death!" exclaimed Miss Laura, who always spoke her mind. "Mamma has begun prosing about that everlasting Sir Frederic Manning."

CHAPTER XXXII.

"LOVE ALTERS NOT!"

THAT evening Mrs. Digby died. As Mr. Warrenne never mentioned any details respecting his patients in his family, Maud was left in profound ignorance of the facts connected with her last moments. She was, therefore, unable to tell such of the neighbours as inquired whether Mrs. Digby died fast or slow, or hard or soft. For it must not be inferred because the Warrennes' visiting list was circumscribed, that they therefore were not on speaking terms with any of their neighbours. The few families who lived near were very gracious in their manner whenever they met Maud, and used to ask quite affectionately after her family. They also pitied her very largely, whenever her name was mentioned. They pitied her for not having a carriage—for not being in society—for her sister having married before her—for never having been to school, and therefore, as they thought, received no education. They pitied her (on speculation) for being shy—for not knowing how to give a dinner-party—for not going to London, and for wearing straw bonnets; in fact, they pitied her situation in every point of view, and did everything but try to mend it.

Some people have such a quantity of pity to spare that they have some to bestow even on persons with whom they are not acquainted. This was the case to a remarkable extent with the hosier's wife, who happened to meet Maud on her way to the post-office with a letter for Leonard, and forthwith began to pity Mrs. Digby.

"So poor Mrs. Digby is dead at last!" said she, in a tone of extreme compassion, "after such a tedious illness! I did *so* pity her! So melancholy it seemed for her, poor thing, living all alone there at Forrel Court—so very lonely for an invalid."

Now, as Mrs. Digby was rather prouder than usual, and was not in the habit of associating with hosiers' wives, even when they kept a carriage as Mrs. Sharpe did, it need not be said that that lady had never been an eye-witness to the solitude of Forrel Court.

Maud, who was always singularly embarrassed by Mrs. Sharpe's manners, and never knew what to say to her, made some vague reply, accompanied by a gesture as if she wished to move on to the post-office.

"But, Miss Warrenne," said Mrs. Sharpe, detaining her, "I hope there was a physician called in; I do trust that poor dear lady had farther advice."

Maud was happy to relieve her disquietude by assuring her that Dr. — (naming one of the first physicians of the day) had been in frequent attendance upon her during the last three months of her life.

She did not add that nothing but her father's urgent remonstrances would have induced Mrs. Digby to permit a physician to be called in.

"I am truly thankful to hear this! I am rejoiced, indeed, to know that Dr. — was with her; it must be such a relief—such a satisfaction to her relatives, you know," said Mrs. Sharpe, with a manner that could not fail to be interpreted as meaning—"thank Heaven she was not left to the tender mercies of such an ignorant man as your father!"

"As Mrs. Digby had not relations, I believe you are the only person likely to be much rejoiced by the visits of Dr. —," replied Maud, making another move.

There was one fortunate circumstance connected with Mrs. Sharpe's ill-breeding—she was wholly impervious to satire—she was equally incapable of taking a jest or feeling a reproof. Maud's retort, therefore, fell to the ground, and she rejoined with much cordiality:

"I suppose you don't happen to know, Miss Warrenne, who is likely to succeed to Mrs. Digby's property? A very fine property, poor thing!"

Maud had a mind to ask whether Mrs. Digby was to be pitied for going to heaven, but she restrained herself, and replied quietly that the will had not yet been opened. Then, disengaging herself from her companion, she succeeded at last in lodging her letter in the post-office. She could not restrain a smile as she thought how little Mrs. Sharpe had suspected the contents of her letter, which she had written that morning by her father's desire, to inform Leonard of Mrs. Digby's death, and to summon him immediately to England.

When Mrs. Digby's will was opened, it was found that she left her estate to Leonard Warrenne on condition that he assumed the name and arms of Digby with his own, and to Alice, in consideration of her blindness, she bequeathed ten thousand pounds.

Of course there was a great commotion in the neighbourhood. Some persons thought Mrs. Digby must have been deranged; others thought naturally enough that she had better have left her property to them. Mrs. Stapylton took the wisest part. She proclaimed to Maud, at the church door the very next Sunday, that she had always thought Mr. Leonard a very charming young man, and that she sincerely rejoiced at his good fortune. Perhaps it occurred to her that, by means of one of her four daughters, the property might at last be brought into her family. At any rate, her conduct was in better taste than that of Mrs. Sharpe, who cast on the Warrennes' pew, as she strode up the aisle, a look of such mingled disdain and anger that Maud had much ado to help laughing.

Mrs. Sharpe could not endure Mr. Warrenne, for he was too honest, too direct in all his ways, to suit her feelings; the only pleasure that she derived from Mrs. Digby's will was certainly a vivid one; it consisted in assuring all her neighbours that she was very sorry indeed to find that Mr. Warrenne had lowered himself so much, for it was easy to see how he had employed himself during his long

attendance upon Mrs. Digby, and it was only a surprise to her that there was nobody found to take up the matter, and make it the subject of a law-suit!

When in turn she said this to Mrs. Creswick, that lady merely replied :

"Mr. Warrenne is one of my great favourites, so, if you please, we will change the subject."

For Mrs. Creswick knew by experience that all attempts at conviction fail with that kind of woman ; for as soon as you have distinctly proved the error of what they have advanced, instead of attempting to carry on the argument, they go back to the first statement, and repeat word for word the facts that you have just disproved to them.

Mr. Scudamore was very much pleased that Alice had a legacy—not, as he remarked, that it was wanted, but that it would enable the child to have some indulgences which she had hitherto gone without. She could have a low carriage, with a pair of ponies, which he had once heard her wish for : and he should build her a green-house, for she was as fond of flowers as her father. He also remarked at the same time that he was sorry Queen Maud had been left out, but that without doubt she was handsome enough to get married without a sixpence, if she would be a little less perverse.

Maud rejoiced, without the drawback of a single thought, in her sister's fortune ; she might be jealous of the regard of those she liked, but it was out of her nature to be envious of money.

As Mrs. Digby's will had been made before Alice married, Captain Scudamore took care to secure the legacy to herself, a proceeding which Alice could not understand, and which she troubled herself little enough about, for her thoughts were all occupied by the approaching cowslip gathering.

At last the cowslips were ready. Mrs. Thorne had kept a watchful eye over them, for her cowslip wine was famous, and though nobody drank it at the Woodlands, yet she fancied that she saved a great deal of money by it.

Maud's presence on all these occasions was indispensable—not so much for the work she did, as for the spirit she threw into everything—the air of enjoyment she brought with her.

She was to breakfast at the Woodlands, and her father was to fetch her back in the evening.

It was a delightful morning ; the sky one sapphire, and the young green trees swaying and shivering in the fresh breeze. They were early people at the Woodlands. Mr. Scudamore and his son were loitering in the garden when Maud arrived. On the other side of the hedge Mrs. Thorne, with her spade on her shoulder, might be seen in serious converse with Jack Robins.

Alice soon put her pretty head out of the casement window and called them all in to breakfast, which Mrs. Thorne dispensed with her usual oddity, and clothed in a costume that defies all description.

Now Mrs. Thorne was very stingy of her sugar; nothing she grudged so much as giving anybody an extra lump. It was a constant amusement to Captain Scudamore and Alice to tease her for more sugar. Sometimes they contrived to get the sugar-basin between them, and pillage it at their ease; and sometimes Alice would boldly take out a lump, and nibble it with her little white teeth; then Mrs. Thorne would threaten her with all kinds of disasters, and Mr. Scudamore would laugh, and take her part. After breakfast, while they were providing themselves with baskets, Sir Frederic Manning came in.

"What! You are here at last!" said Mrs. Thorne. "I thought all your fine words meant nothing; and that you were going to give me the slip."

"*You*, Mrs. Thorne! You could not think that, when you know how happy I always am in your society. Which of these baskets am I to have?"

While Mrs. Thorne was selecting a basket for Sir Frederic, Mr. Scudamore could not help giving Maud a few private instructions.

"Now, don't be foolish, Queen Maud," he said; "the man is a baronet. If you were half as pleasant to him as you are alone with us, you would very soon find yourself Lady Manning; be lively and amusing, and sing some of your pretty songs after dinner; and I don't see why one basket should not serve you both!"

Maud held up her basket with a laugh, which was the very smallest she could find, and would hold about a handful of cowslips. "I often regret, grandfather, that you had not a few daughters to dispose of," she said; "I am sure you would be indefatigable; and I think it possible you might succeed. But it is not my way, grandfather, so you had better let me alone."

Notwithstanding, Sir Frederic managed to walk beside her, as they all went to the cowslip field.

"I am sorry you did not come with your sister to see my Ruth," said Sir Frederic to Maud.

"What's that about his statue? Had he one after all?" cried Mrs. Thorne, who was walking stoutly along, with a large hand-basket slung at the end of a spud, and carried over her shoulder as a woodman carries his faggot. "I would have gone with you had I known that."

"Oh! it is beautiful," said Alice, who was walking beside Maud, holding her hand like a child. "She is on one knee gleaning, and looking up; her head is turned round so gracefully; and she has some ears of corn in her dress; and Dick was delighted with it."

"Ah! then he told the truth for once," remarked Mrs. Thorne.

"I tell you what, Mrs. Thorne," said Sir Frederic, "if you minded what Mr. Ranger told you, you would not think so ill of your neighbours."

"Don't talk to me of Ranger!" exclaimed Mrs. Thorne, who when

she did not respect a person seldom prefixed the Mr. to his name—"he is the man for speaking ill of his neighbours. He tried to take away Jack Robins' character, and called him a Sabbath-breaker."

"And you know, aunt, he did shoot a blackbird one Sunday morning," said Captain Scudamore.

"And startled Mr. Ranger's horse, you know," said Alice.

"If he did, it was because he said he would," returned Mrs. Thorne; "the villain had been at his peas for days, and he said he would shoot him the very next time: and now set to work all of you, and gather. I am going off to hoe the turnips."

So saying, she slung down the large basket for the use of the society, and took her way across the meadow.

The cowslips scented the air deliciously; the wind blew pretty strongly, and rustled the ladies' dresses, and scattered Alice's long bright curls all about her face.

"Dick, my hair teases me," said Alice, who vainly tried to clear it away.

Captain Scudamore tried to put it up under her hat, but as he could not manage it, Maud took it in hand, and secured her ringlets behind her ears.

Alice, then sitting on the grass, gathered right and left all the cowslips within her reach. All her gestures were so childlike and innocent, and the style of her beauty so youthful, that no one could look at her without a sort of compassionate admiration.

"She is extremely pretty," said Sir Frederic to Maud; "you do not in the least resemble her."

"No," said Maud, smiling. "See, Dick, my basket is nearly full."

"Such a scandalous little basket!" said Captain Scudamore; and he emptied it suddenly into Alice's lap.

"You may fill it again!" said Maud, laughing; and she went to sit under the walnut tree, where Mr. Scudamore was composedly looking on.

"You are too tired," he said.

"Why, yes, grandfather," said Maud. "I am afraid my tastes are not very pastoral."

"They are not, Queen Maud—you are born to be a great lady—to live in a manor-house—and to have nothing to do but to order your servants—and now's your time."

"Thank you, grandfather; I am quite as well pleased to think that Leonard will have all this good luck—how he will enjoy the thick woods and the mossy paths at Forrel Court; and the books and the pictures—far more than if he had been born to expect them! We may look for him in three weeks, don't you think, grandfather? We wrote a fortnight ago—how soon do letters reach Smyrna?"

"Certainly, Queen Maud, there are very few women like you!" said Mr. Scudamore, admiringly.

Maud laughed.

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"Look, grandfather; they are all following our example," she said; "they all seem to think that a pastoral life has its limits."

As there were three maid-servants and two farm boys hard at work gathering, the amateurs felt privileged to leave off when it pleased them. They came and sat round on the grass under the tree.

"It is growing warm," said Captain Scudamore; "Alice seems to have had enough of it."

"Oh! yes, the sun is so hot," said Alice, taking off her hat, and shaking down her beautiful ringlets.

"I say, Miss Warrenne," said Sir Frederic, "I believe I made a very stupid speech to you just now—it did not sound over civil at any rate—and the worst of it is, that if you try to explain away a blunder of that kind you only make it appear more serious."

"Oh! I know what you mean," said Maud, laughing; "but I assure you I took your speech literally, as it was intended."

"What's it all about?" asked Mr. Scudamore.

"A story of a curious old gentleman who always asked questions," replied Maud.

Sir Frederic burst out laughing. Mr. Scudamore shook his head, but laughed too.

"You are a termagant, Queen Maud, but it becomes you," said Mr. Scudamore.

"I should think that everything you did became you," added Sir Frederic.

"You owed me that," said Maud, with a laugh; "now you have paid your debts."

"Hollo! there's a carriage-and-four coming up the hill," said Captain Scudamore.

"A carriage?—so there is!—and four posters!" said Sir Frederic, raising himself up to look.

"Whose carriage, Dick?" asked Alice.

"I don't know. I can hardly see the carriage," said Captain Scudamore.

The knoll on which they were sitting overlooked the road, and as the carriage came slowly up the hill they could see the travellers.

"The Reynolds'!" exclaimed Maud. "Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds—look, grandfather!—and Florence Reynolds."

"*That* Florence Reynolds!" exclaimed Sir Frederic.

"What! don't you remember her?" said Mr. Scudamore, laughing.

"That sallow thing Florence Reynolds?" repeated Sir Frederic.

"Is she sallow? I'm so glad! She was such a disagreeable cross creature," said Alice.

They all laughed heartily.

"Though it is not exactly right to be glad, you know," said Maud; "but I agree with Alice she was very ill-natured."

"I should be sorry if she were ill; but she deserves to be sallow," repeated Alice.

"What a spiteful little thing it is!" said Mr. Scudamore, stroking her shining hair.

"Alice has not forgiven her for all the attention Dick used to pay her!" said Maud, with a merry burst of laughter.

"I! I pay her attention? I always disliked the woman! I believe I never spoke a dozen words to her!" exclaimed Captain Scudamore.

"I know; but I made her believe you did," replied Maud.

"What did you do that for?" said Captain Scudamore, taking Alice's hand.

"Why, to amuse myself. I had settled in my mind that Miss Reynolds should turn your head, and it is a mercy for you that she did not; I don't know how it happened; but I remember I was rather angry that you escaped."

"You don't know how it happened?" said Captain Scudamore, looking with a smile at Alice.

"That's his answer," said Mr. Scudamore.

"He could not have a better," said Sir Frederic.

"They will be neighbours of yours at Heathfield," remarked Mr. Scudamore.

"And of Leonard's too," said Alice.

"I wonder what Master Leonard will say to her marriage?" said Mr. Scudamore. "I always thought there was a kind of liking between him and the fair Florence."

"I don't believe it!" cried Maud.

"You do in your heart, Queen Maud," said Mr. Scudamore.

"I think so too, from one or two things I have observed," said Captain Scudamore.

"You think wrong, both of you!" persisted Maud.

"Time will show," said Mr. Scudamore.

"But is she really going to marry Courtenay?" asked Sir Frederic.

"Why, that I can't say till I see her in the church," replied Mr. Scudamore; "but so it is reported."

"It is all settled," said Maud; "Mrs. Creswick told me of it."

"She will give him the slip yet," said Mr. Scudamore.

"I should think Reynolds the sort of fellow to keep her up to her traces," remarked Sir Frederic.

"Now is that the proper way to speak of a lady?" said Alice.

"Rather colloquial!" said Captain Scudamore, laughing.

"I believe I was in love with her for about a week myself," said Sir Frederic.

"In *love*, do you call it?" said Maud, disdainfully.

"On my word I was—or something like it. To be sure she was as different then as anything you can conceive—it is a great misfortune to a woman to lose her complexion."

"I know what Maud is thinking of," said Alice, in a low voice to

Captain Scudamore. "I know by her silence—those lines she is so fond of—

"Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom."

"She is quite right," said Captain Scudamore; "how does it end?"

"If this be error and upon me proved,
I never wrote, nor no man ever loved!"

"What lines are they quoting?" asked Sir Frederic, turning to Maud.

"Something about a woman losing her complexion!" replied Maud.

"I don't know what this Mr. Courtenay could be dreaming of to venture on marrying such a coquette," said Alice.

"A little occupation for him to look after her," said Mr. Scudamore. "But I don't know who we shall find for Queen Maud, since we cannot choose for her out of Fuller's Worthies."

"Be quiet, grandfather!" said Maud. "I wish you had five red-haired nieces to get off!"

"I should go to school to Mrs. Stapylton if I had," said Mr. Scudamore.

"Oh, now we are growing scandalous!" said Alice. "The grandfather always begins with Mrs. Stapylton when he sets in for a gossip."

"And here comes Mrs. Thorne to scold us for not gathering her cowslips," said Sir Frederic.

"I tell you what," said Mrs. Thorne, pausing and resting on her hoe; "if there does not come a little rain soon, I would not give much for your turnips. But I thought how it would be; it was very well I had somebody to do my work while you were idling and chattering here. I have a great mind not to give any of you a drop of my wine!"

"That would be a dreadful alternative," said Mr. Scudamore, laughing, and giving Maud his arm; "but as our idling has given us all an appetite, we will go in, with your leave, and see if we can get some luncheon."

"And, in default of cowslip wine, we will try and put up with a glass of claret," said Captain Scudamore.

"Ah, you will live to see the inside of the Fleet!" cried Mrs. Thorne, shaking her head. "But never mind!"

"Never mind," repeated Sir Frederic; "we shall learn to play tennis there, at any rate."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"THAT HORRID STEAMER!"

"I SAY, Lucy," whispered Edward, as the two children were seated in the window of the drawing-room at the Ferns, "I wish we had gone with Maud to-day to gather the cowslips."

"So do I," said Lucy; "Maud would have made us some cowslip tea."

"And Mrs. Thorne would have given us such a large piece of plum cake," said Edward.

"Yes, she always lets us eat as much as we like," added Lucy. "She says, 'There, you monkeys, make yourselves sick!'"

"Hasn't she a hook nose?" said Edward.

"And such an old straw bonnet," said Lucy, laughing.

"Harley says she is not a lady," said Edward.

"Isn't she?" returned Lucy, musing.

"Harley says no lady would wear such old clothes," remarked Edward.

"Then she is wrong," said Lucy. "Mrs. Creswick told us not to judge of people by their clothes."

"I say, I wish papa and mamma were not coming home to-day," said Edward.

"So do I," said Lucy; "I don't want to see the new baby!"

"Nor do I," said Edward; "I should like to break its head!"

"Hush!" said Lucy, glancing towards Mrs. Creswick.

"How many children has papa got now?" asked Edward.

"Four," replied Lucy; "there's Florence, and you and me, and the baby."

"Florence is not a child!" said Edward, looking puzzled.

"No; but she belongs to papa," returned Lucy.

Edward nodded his conviction to this remark.

"I think I hear the sound of wheels," said Mrs. Creswick; "can little Lucy see anything coming?"

"It is papa's carriage," said Lucy, getting down from the window-seat.

"Let us go into the portico and meet them," said Mrs. Creswick.

As soon as the first bustle of the arrival was over, the children, pleased at being kissed and caressed, and hearing a good deal of some pretty toys that mamma had got for them in the carriage, forgot their disappointment about the cowslips, and were prepared to look with a favourable eye on the baby, who, with his two nurses, had followed in a post-chaise.

Edward grasped it so tightly when he went to kiss it that he made it squall. Lucy admired its embroidered robe, and touched its little hands with more timid fingers.

"There, my darling loves, go all of you upstairs," said Mrs.

Reynolds; "and I hope you will be very kind to baby, and love him very much."

"And now, my dear Florence, let me look at you," said Mrs. Creswick. "I am very glad we have got you back in England again, for it is clear to me that the Continent has not agreed with you at all."

Florence lifted up her eyes to her aunt, and smiled, but very sadly. "We have all great reason to rejoice at finding ourselves again in England," said Mr. Reynolds. "I hope we shall none of us forget the privileges we enjoy as British subjects. I consider that it is a crime to expatriate oneself for any length of time, and those who reside abroad should forfeit the protection of every government, and be treated as outlaws. Such are my views."

"Which is my room, Aunt Creswick?" said Florence. "Perhaps you will allow me to go up to rest until dinner."

"One moment, my dear," said Mrs. Creswick, laying her hand on her niece's arm. "I see Mr. Courtenay coming across the lawn with the Colonel."

Florence turned paler than before at his name. Mr. Reynolds seemed exceedingly gratified.

"Really, this is a mark of attention—I did not at all expect to find him here on our arrival. Florence, did you understand that Mr. Courtenay was at the Ferns?"

Mr. Courtenay's entrance protected Florence from the task of replying. She rather wondered how her father expected the coldest courtship to be carried on, since he appeared so much overcome by every trifling mark of politeness that she received.

There was, however, no particular eagerness in his greeting. He spoke to those nearest to him first, and then advancing to Florence, and taking her hand slightly, he hoped she was not much fatigued by her journey, remarked that the weather was extremely warm, and then fell back to Mrs. Reynolds' chair, and began laughing with her about her passage from Håvre.

"I thought of you on Tuesday," he said. "You must have had a rough night of it."

"Oh, don't remind me of my troubles!" said Mrs. Reynolds. "I expected to die; I told Mr. Reynolds so—I never suffered more!"

"Will you never make a good sailor?" said Mr. Courtenay; "you who have been twice round the Cape!"

"I know; and each time barely escaped with my life. But this shall be the last, I am determined. Oh, we were such a party! Both nurses ill, and poor Mr. Reynolds half dead with headache!"

"And what became of the baby?" asked Courtenay.

"Florence took compassion on him, poor little fellow," said Mrs. Reynolds. "She nursed him so carefully; I did not know you were so good a nurse before, dear Florence."

"Are you fond of the sea, Miss Reynolds?" asked Courtenay.

"Far from it," replied Florence; "but I believe I suffered less than any one on board, and therefore I was able to be of some use."

"Well, now, tell us the news of the neighbourhood," said Mrs. Reynolds; "who are our nearest neighbours at Heathfield?"

"Your nearest neighbour is Mr. Leonard Warrenne, who has just inherited Forrel Court of the late Mrs. Digby," said Mrs. Creswick.

"Mrs. Digby dead!" exclaimed Mr. Reynolds.

"And Leonard Warrenne her heir!" said Courtenay. "How is that?"

Florence turned deadly white.

"Was he related to her?" asked Mrs. Reynolds.

"Is he in England?" asked Courtenay.

"Is not he very handsome?" said Mrs. Reynolds.

"What was her motive for such a bequest?" asked Mr. Reynolds.

"Mr. Leonard Warrenne (whom you must now, if you please, call Mr. Warrenne Digby) is not related to the late Mrs. Digby, to whom I understand he afforded some service during a storm," replied Mrs. Creswick; "he has not yet arrived in England, but I believe is expected daily. He is considered remarkably handsome, I believe, my dear Mrs. Reynolds, or, at all events, he *will* be, when he is known to be in possession of an estate of eight thousand a year."

"I hope he won't make ducks and drakes of it," said Colonel Creswick. "When a man comes into a fortune he did not expect, it is a great temptation."

"Rely upon it he won't be spoiled," said Mrs. Creswick. "I think that this time next year all those who are now present will agree with me in saying that Leonard Warrenne has not been spoiled by prosperity."

"I agree with you beforehand, Mrs. Creswick," said Mr. Courtenay; "he is one of the few persons who deserve wealth, for he has a refinement about him that would ensure its being spent gracefully. I am heartily glad of it. This accounts for some of his vagaries; no doubt Mrs. Digby sent him abroad. She must have been an excellent woman—a woman of discrimination. She has transmitted her estate to a gentleman."

"I am glad to hear that you think so highly of our future neighbour," said Mr. Reynolds; "I trust we may become intimate with him."

"He is a very nice young fellow," said Colonel Creswick; "we must look about for him, and find him a wife."

"I think we will let him do that for himself," returned Mrs. Creswick.

"You are quite right, dearest madam," replied the Colonel, bowing; "every one should follow his own taste in a selection of such importance."

"I can tell you I shall not let him alone so easily," said Mrs. Reynolds, laughing. "I have thought of twenty people for him already. How glad Lucy Harding would be to catch him, or any one of the five Pattersons!"

"He must not marry just yet, thank you," said Courtenay, smiling, and bending down to Mrs. Reynolds; "I shall want him for my groomsman."

"Oh, fie, you naughty man! I hope Florence did not hear you," said Mrs. Reynolds, laughing.

"Why not?" said Courtenay, coolly; "*she* is in the secret, at any rate."

Florence had fallen back in her chair, faint and bewildered; she would gladly have left the room, but she dared not make the attempt unaided. The news she had just heard perfectly unnerved her. She trembled so much that she feared it would be perceived; tears would have relieved her, but how could she dare to weep in the presence of her father, who had betrothed her, and the man to whom she was betrothed? Her tears would be an insult to them, if their source could have been suspected; and she could imagine with what bitter irony her father would visit upon her the sin of crying for nothing.

"Pray, Miss Reynolds," said Courtenay, coming round and leaning on the back of her chair, "was not this Leonard Warrenne that we are all taking about one of your victims?"

Florence coloured painfully, but made no reply.

"He does you great credit," pursued Courtenay, "or did. I don't know whether he has had his heart mended out in Syria, but I assure you he used to wear the willow to a very great extent, and I know you ladies don't like half measures on that subject."

"Oh, Mr. Courtenay!" said Florence.

The distress in her voice was too visible to be mistaken.

"I see," he said to himself. "I should not wonder if she was sorry for it." Then he added aloud, "You are tired to death; you are not a good traveller, Miss Reynolds; you had better put yourself under Mrs. Creswick's care."

Mrs. Creswick came up to her. She was hardly able to stand without assistance, and they went upstairs together to her room.

"My dear," said Mrs. Creswick, sitting down beside her, "your father has ensured your future welfare by this engagement; he has secured for you a husband whom you will be able to esteem and respect. You would not have chosen so wisely for yourself."

"No doubt Mr. Courtenay is very much to be respected, aunt," said Florence, in a dejected tone, "and I have no chance or hope of escaping this marriage," she added.

"And one day, my dear, when the duties of life appear to you of more importance than its pleasures," said Mrs. Creswick, "you will confess to yourself that your father has acted the part of a true friend in thus deciding for you."

Florence saw in an instant that she had nothing to expect from the intervention of her aunt. She was not in the habit of relieving her feelings by complaining. She dropped the subject.

"I feel really ill, aunt," she said; "papa is apt to think that I give way to every little feeling of languor; but you know that has never been one among my many faults. If you will go down and excuse my appearing again to-day, I shall be so much obliged to you."

Mrs. Creswick readily charged herself with this errand, and re-appeared in the drawing-room to announce that Florence was suffering so much from headache that she had advised her to go at once to bed.

Mr. Reynolds remarked that the prevalence of headache among young ladies of the present day was singular, and he thought should be checked.

Mrs. Reynolds declared it was that horrid steamer, and regretted she had allowed Florence to fatigue herself with the baby, though, she remarked, there was no help for it at the time, for every one else was ill besides themselves.

Mr. Courtenay was sitting apart, looking over the *Quarterly Review*. He went on reading.

"Mr. Courtenay," said Mrs. Creswick, stopping as she passed to her own chair, "you must not think me very romantic, or very curious; but I should like very much to know whether my niece ever gave you any decided marks of preference."

"Not the slightest, I give you my word," said Mr. Courtenay, looking up calmly from his book. "This is a very excellent article on Church Preferment."

(To be continued.)

FRIENDSHIP.

FRIENDSHIP is put by an old writer above love itself. In the latter he holds (here agreeing with Montaigne) that there is some sense of pursuit—an endless restless preoccupation vaguely followed by fear of satiety.

Friendship is the loftiest of human relationships. Perfectly voluntary, it is often the most binding and the most permanent. Love, at its highest, grows into friendship. If it does not, love has failed of its fullest fruition. Unfortunate marriages are mostly owing to one form or another of this defect. Affinities of blood are weak compared with the purely spiritual affinities of friendship. Here lies the significance of the oft-quoted French proverb, "Un bon ami vaut mieux qu'un parent."

Sometimes the choice seems to be determined by a certain subtle law of unlikeness; but unlikeness is only efficient when it affords room for the free play of mutual sympathy, admiration, or reverence. Lord Tennyson, in 'In Memoriam,' has this in his view (though the beauty and greatness of his friend Henry Hallam was no doubt magnified somewhat seen through the mists of absence and death). The idea is repeated in many forms, in fact—it presents the most substantial of the recurrent ideas in Lord Tennyson's works—the affection for Henry Hallam colouring even his conception of King Arthur, and projecting itself into the more powerful of his latest works: an idea which was ingeniously, but not exhaustively, worked out by that clever essayist, Matthew Browne, in his volume, 'Views and Opinions.'

The 'In Memoriam' is the loftiest poetic celebration of friendship in its ideal form—the friendship into which all love must grow; indeed it is noticeable that the Laureate constantly slips into comparison of his friendship with love and true marriage.

Montaigne, a very different type of man, in his essays celebrates a friendship true and tried and lofty, which comes in as a softening accompaniment even when he is dealing with matters that to a Frenchman usually permit little inflow of sentiment. In his essay on "Friendship" he likens love to the hunters, who follow the hare, but when they have caught her, despise her, being only pleased at pursuing that which flies. "Friendship, on the contrary," he goes on, "is enjoyed in proportion as it is desired; and it grows up, thrives and increases by enjoyment, as being itself spiritual; and the soul is refined by the practice of it."

All the loftier spirits of the world have magnified friendship. Indeed with the Greeks and Romans friendships stood definitely on the higher form of love of which they had little knowledge, and some (Winckelmann, the German art critic, among them) are prone to say

that love in its more passionate devotions is incompatible with the loftier form of friendship. No doubt, in actual life and in certain circumstances and complications, love and marriage militate against friendships ; but taken broadly, we should be inclined to hold that a true love should only educate for the higher friendship in its training for self-denial, its admiration for dissimilar traits from those possessed, and above all, in its intensifying and quickening all the powers of sympathy.

And this effect will be accomplished by love passing into friendship of the highest order first on the wedded pair themselves. Miss Nesbit, one of our most truthful and accomplished young lyric poets, has this verse, beautifully illustrating this theme :

"We loved, my love, and now it seems
Our love has brought to birth
Friendship, the fairest child of dreams,
The rarest gift of earth.

"Soon die love's roses, fresh and frail,
And when their bloom is o'er,
Not all our heart-wrung tears avail
To give them life once more.

"But when true love with friendship lives,
As now, for thee and me,
Love brings the roses,—Friendship gives
Them immortality."

In the 'Guesses at Truth,' by Augustus and Charles Hare, we have this apt sentence : "Friendship is love, without either flowers or veil." Goethe, whatever defects he may have had, was calculated to be a true friend ; and he has written beautifully in praise of friendship. At one place, he says :

"Wer nicht die Welt in seinen Freunden sieht,
Verdient nicht dass die Welt von ihm erfahre."

Actually making a man's desert of fame to depend on his powers of friendship.

A very wise and observant man has said, "One must go out into the world to find his true counterpart, a familiar friend ; it is little likely he will find it among his own relations ; or if he do, there is a risk that it will be associated with narrowing influences which are not wholly compensated by its intensity of partiality. Dr. South devotes one of his most eloquent sermons to friendship, and in it he says :

"Friendship consists properly in mutual offices, and a generous strife in alternate acts of kindness. But he who does a kindness to an ungrateful person, sets his seal to a flint, and sows his seed upon the sand. Upon the former he makes no impression, and from the latter he finds no production."

Addison, in his quietly practical and polished manner, has written well in praise of friendship. He avers that friendship is a strong and habitual inclination in two persons to promote the good and happiness of each other. "False friendship," says the learned Robert

Burton, "is like the ivy, decays and ruins the wall it embraces ; but true friendship gives new life and animation to the object it supports." In 'Guesses at Truth' we have these very incisive and suggestive remarks : "We never know the true value of friends till they die. While they live we are too sensitive of their faults : when we have lost them, we only see their virtues. Friendship closes its eyes rather than see the moon eclipsed, while malice denies that it ever was at the full."

The books of Herder, the great German poet, abound in tributes to friendship ; this is perhaps one of the most discriminating :

"The friend who holds up before me the mirror, conceals not my smallest faults, warns me kindly, reproves me affectionately when I have not performed my duty ; he is my friend, however little he may appear so. Again, if a man flatteringly praises and lauds me, never reproves me, overlooks my faults and forgives them before I have repented, he is my enemy, however much he may appear my friend."

Calderon, the Spanish poet, meets us with the same teaching. "Wise friends," he writes, "are the best book of life, because they teach with voice and looks." Another says, "The essence of friendship is entireness, a total magnanimity and trust." And indeed it is true that friendship is the foe of flattery. No friendship is worth the name unless it aims at doing the highest good, assisting to escape from the manifest forms of selfishness, and to look at duty with fresh impulse. The delights of friendship are so select and inspiring that they cannot be described. We must quote Montaigne in support of this. He says :

"As friendship in its highest phases is a constant effort to look through the eyes of another, it affords the finest education in sympathy. By it man is first prepared to do his duty in society in abnegating the individual desire and impulse. It is a training-school for the loftiest virtues. Hence the saying of Rabbi Hillel has a deeper and wider meaning than appears on the surface : 'Judge not thy friend till thou standest in his place.' Like port, friends grow sweeter as they grow older, and have gone long ocean journeys. This is a noble verse to friendship, but not nobler than it deserves in its ministry of vicarious effort and suffering, and devotion :

"Me, too, thy nobleness has taught
To master my despair ;
The fountains of my hidden life
Are through thy friendship fair."

In full, the final and the most beautiful aspect of friendship is to find it as Coleridge did, "a sheltering tree." How rare, how delightful, with what fine suggestions and impulses fruitful, the sight of two old men whose friendship has survived separation for half a lifetime, and who transmit, as if by a finer kind of tradition, the gift to their children and children's children. These are the golden threads that shine in the warp of the world's web, and make ordinary life a poem.

A. H. JAPP, LL.D.

WHERE THE PLANE-TREES GROW.

"Now, therefore, I say, Love; love truly and long—even for ever. And if you can do other things well, do them: but if not, at least learn to do that, for it is a very gentle thing and sweet in the learning."

EARLY in the morning the sunlight strikes across an open space where tennis-courts, a wide, broad road, and a long green garden, with an asphalte path running round it, give the opening somewhat the appearance of a square. On sunny mornings, the leaves of the plane-trees bordering the long garden, which belongs to an institution for the blind, take on a sharp, glittering light, and rustle tunefully in the passing breeze. Towards seven o'clock the watering-carts pass down the road, which then shines and gleams like a track of silver, and reflects the waving planes as the surface of a lake might do. The houses round the space are large and imposing, and mostly of warm red brick, and the roofs are tiled, so that, on bright mornings, looking out on to it all, one receives an impression that has something of a foreign element in it—what with the rich colouring, green leaves, sharp sunlight, shining roads, dappled skies, and the flower and fruit-laden carts rolling homewards from the great market in the city's heart.

On one side of the tennis-courts is the south wall of a handsome red-bricked Conservatoire of Music. There are no windows in this wall, because the organ is built against its entire breadth. Sometimes, quite early in the morning, when one has time to lie and listen and to think, a grand rush of music swells across the sunlit space, and strikes the air with a pleasantness and peace, echoes of which linger round about one throughout the intervals of the hurrying, hard-pressed day.

High up, at the top of the building, a little, yellow-curtained window looks out over the tennis-courts, the wide road, and the garden of the blind. This was once the window of the resident secretary, a girl called Angela Hardinge. Across the space, at the farthest end of the line of houses, and almost at right angles with the yellow-curtained window, was another window, statelier, taller, larger-paned, belonging to the study of one Dick Clayton, a rising young journalist, who hoped, by steady effort, to run his journalism into the broader, airier ways of authorship pure and plain.

Dick Clayton had once known Angela Hardinge well as the petted, only daughter of a luxurious, well-appointed home. He had heard of the terrible blow that had befallen her, leaving her, almost on the same day, fatherless, and penniless too, except for her own little personal treasures. He had also heard of the quiet, brave way in which she put on battle armour, and showed an earnest front to the

grim world that faced her ; and, at time of hearing, he had conceived a great admiration for her. Then other interests had cropped up, and she had slipped more or less from his recollection. Life is short, and the demands that are made on a man's memory quite excusably great of course.

Rather more than a year since they had met, there was, one evening, at the above-mentioned Conservatoire, a great reception, to which Clayton, as one of the artistically-elect of the neighbourhood, had been bidden. It was an intensely hot night in July, and he and a friend had climbed for coolness and a cigar to the top of the building. In a desultory, aimless fashion they wandered from one deserted music-room to another, chatting as they went. Presently they came to a door lower than any of the others. The friend suggested that it led to the roof perhaps, and Clayton turned the handle.

They stood on the threshold of a small and dainty room, whose aspect was about as unlike that of the dreary music-rooms around as two things of the same kind can possibly be. One of the low walls was hung with a broad piece of tapestry embroidered in gold and palest pink. On the edge of the dado, which was in black wood, were little pictures, medallions, some exquisite pieces of majolica and other relics of a former state. Behind a soft, wide chair was a tall, enamelled screen, and on its shelves were charming photographs and sketches in pen and ink. The floor was stained to match the dado, and a Persian rug of rich, warm tints was laid across it. On a little table by the big chair there was a white china bowl filled with roses. Their sweet, faint scent swept through the room. Books were everywhere.

As the two men stood, vaguely, wonderingly taking in these details, a curtained door inside the room, which led into another even smaller room beyond, was opened, and a rather tall, slight woman's figure stepped forward. She wore a simple black gown, but at the neck was a large, turned-down collar of soft white cambric which somehow became her infinitely. Her hair was parted in the middle, loosely waved, and gathered together in a knot. The light from a shaded lamp falling on it, touched it with a sort of tender glory. Her face was quite girlish-looking, yet thought and work, sorrow and solitude, had stamped it with a rare sweetness.

A genuine surprise and pleasure spread over Clayton's face. In an instant he had recognised her. From the shadow of the little doorway he walked a step into the room.

"Miss—Miss Hardinge ! A thousand apologies for intruding on you like this. But now, having found you, say that I may come in, won't you ?"

He spoke with the pleasant assurance of the man who knows he is always welcome. A wave of flame shot up into Angela Hardinge's face, and in her voice was that nervous little quiver which is often born of a great delight.

"Oh, please do. I am so glad," she answered, simply.

Then Clayton turned to introduce his friend, but the friend had quietly disappeared. He had some intention of borrowing a ten-pound note from Clayton on the morrow, and was wise in his generation accordingly.

When the other two thus found themselves left all alone in that far-off dainty little room against the roof, they both laughed a laugh which drew them dangerously near each other—figuratively speaking, of course.

"Who would have thought it?" said Dick, in utter and supreme content.

"Who, indeed?" smiled Angela, too happy to regret that she could think of nothing more brilliant in the way of a rejoinder.

Then she made Dick sit down in the big soft chair, while she got a little wicker one for herself, and drew it in front of the table where the roses were. They talked of very many things. Angela told him all the details of her busy simple life, and he told her not a few of his. She told him how, except for her daily walk, she rarely left those two high, lonely rooms—the little writing-room in which they were, and the smaller sleeping one beyond; how, before the masters and the pupils came, she used to go and practise on the great organ in the concert-room; how all day she was at her letters and secretarial work; how towards the twilight-time she used to take her walk, speeding up the long avenue to the cool broad spaces of the Heath, there watching the sun go down beyond Harrow spire, and even, on very clear days, getting a glimpse in the opposite direction of the great grey dome and gilded cross of far St. Paul's; how at nights she read and wrote for her own delight.

Then they wondered how they had come to lose sight of each other for so long. Dick reproached Angela for not having let him hear of her and her way of life. Angela answered that you cannot quite go up and down the world pouring out your news to people who do not show any particular desire to become acquainted with it. Dick considered that this was positively adding insult to injury. To think of the hopeless inquiries he had made, of the vain hours he had spent in trying to ascertain the whereabouts of his former little friend. Only to think!

Whereupon Angela smiled again. She knew Dick Clayton very fairly well. And yet—and yet—she felt all the old lost gaiety of heart surging back into her life once more.

"Women are such poor fools," she argued with herself; yet felt it was worth while being a poor fool, if only for the happiness of being a woman too.

So they sat talking of the past and present. Before they parted they touched the future.

"By the way," said Dick, suddenly starting up, and making for the yellow-curtained window, which was thrown wide open, "it is exactly

as I thought. Do come here a moment, Miss Hardinge, will you?"

Angela went to him and stood by his side, looking out. There was a bright, clear full moon, and the broad road and the wide green spaces between the houses were flooded in the soft silver light. The leaves of the plane-trees shone and twinkled like so many thousand tiny polished shields.

"How beautiful!" said Angela, breathlessly.

But that was not quite what Dick had meant.

"Do you see," he asked, "right over there, in a direct line from that telephone-pole, and just beyond the Blind School kitchen garden—do you see the corner house? Well, my rooms are there. I moved into them about a month ago. Now wasn't it a providential arrangement?"

Then Angela laughed merrily.

"Why providential?" she inquired.

"Why," he answered, "do you really need to ask? All day long, while you are working here, I am working there. My window faces yours. And before dinner, you know, I, too, have a way of strolling up the hill. . . I should like to think that we might sometimes—stroll up together."

After he had gone, Angela went to the little table where the bowls and pots of roses were. In a tiny silver frame there was a photograph of him, which he had once given her. She should have placed it at random amongst the others on the shelves; but just as he had a place of his own in her life, so he must have a place of his own in her room. She had drawn her chair so as to cover the little frame as much as possible, but her cheeks took on a sudden scarlet hue as she wondered whether he had noticed it all the same.

As a matter of fact he had; but she need not have troubled, for he thought none the less of her on that account.

Thus it came to pass that they saw each other constantly, and, in the fulness of time, became something more to one another than even the best of friends.

For it chanced that one calm golden day in the late autumn they walked far and long by the high beautiful road that runs eastwards in a fine and stately line from Hampstead Heath, and lies, as it were, between two worlds—the great world of London on the south, and the mysterious green country towards the north. They had some tea at the charming and classical little tea-garden belonging to that quaint old hostelry, 'The Spaniards,' and were happy and gay exceedingly, these simple forms of entertainment being the joy of Angela's heart. They were quite alone, for it was late in the season. After tea, when Angela was rested, they strolled out in the direction of the fields. A deep clear yellow glow shone in the western sky; the distant horizon

was veiled in mist ; fragments of song were borne across the land ; it was a very tender, quiet scene.

Amidst it all, Dick asked his dearest girl if she would marry him. And very beautifully and bravely she answered him according to his heart's desire.

After that, their days flowed on very gently and delightfully, and they managed to be often together. Dick would come round to Angela in her dainty room which breathed a repose and charm not too often found in any room ; and he would read her strong and exquisite things ; and they would talk concerning them, for they were not afraid to be grave together. Sometimes he would bring her to his own rooms and entertain her with a great delight ; but this only happened once or twice, for he was very careful of her.

They continually discussed their future. They were both quite poor, and, as Dick said, two poverties, even when joined together, will not make one richness—as the world counts richness. Not that they would have minded being poor together, but in marriage there are many and strange things to think of. However, they were pleased to arrange theirs for the Christmas Eve of the following year ; Christmas Eve being Angela's birthday. They even had the audacity to discuss their wedding journey. He was to take her down to a certain storied old-world spot on the edge of the eastern sea, and there, amongst the legends and the loneliness, they two, for a little space, would dwell and walk together.

In the meantime Dick was to work very hard at the development of a certain inspiration which had occurred to him in the watches of the night—a glorious work, which Angela, who knew of it alone of humankind, had much at heart. To her, the world grew a dear and pleasant abiding-place. In it were great thoughts and hopes and efforts ; much work, much strife and storm perhaps ; but one man, one heart-love only.

So the weeks went by, until at last the work was finished, and launched on to the treacherous sea of public approval ; and the winds and tides being greatly in its favour, it breasted the waves of criticism and jealousy, and came back into port with colours flying. That is to say, one smiling April morning Dick awoke to find himself famous—his name was on the lips of the whole literary world.

His success had come to him smoothly. He had not been forced to fight for it, and spend his strength in weary years of pot-boiling labour before attaining it. They placed a little laurel wreath of fame about his brows ere he reached his thirtieth year ; it was a series of bold sketches on the right subject at the right moment that did it. They were wonderful in detail, exquisitely artistic in treatment and conception ; one of the more penetrating of the critics thought to see in them strong and sincere evidence of a gentle feminine influence. Then people began to inquire about him. The most influential

publications of the day invited him to contribute to their columns. Great managers and leading actors solicited him to write plays for them. Advertising companies offered him fabulous sums to boom their speciality, even in the bye-ways of his work. When he told Angela of this last, she answered, with a charming little show of anger, that really degradation could go no further; while all the time her heart was overflowing with gratitude to these dear people, who showed their great good sense in that it was her dearest one whom they delighted so to honour!

Rarely, however, does a man come from such a record unspotted, untrammelled, void of the great offence of thinking himself a genius. Alas, alas for Angela, Dick did not!

With all his culture, and undoubtedly high order of brain power, he was a past-master in thorough knowledge of the thousand indescribable ways which fascinate women so particularly. Society began to claim him as one of its petted darlings. Few fashionable gatherings were considered quite complete without the presence of the young lion of the hour. The grave and tender little evenings when he read to Angela, or brought his work to do by her side, and trusted to the rare and beautiful instinct of appreciation which was so especially hers, to know where he was doing best or worst—those evenings were known of her no more.

It was very sad and very incomprehensible; but then so are many things of life.

She bore it loyally. When he flew up the wide stone stairs that led to her little rooms, to give her the hurried embrace, which was all he could spare her from the world just then, she said, as she heard his feet speeding from her again, that her love must never make her narrow and exacting; that all those people amongst whom he moved must be the better and the richer for his presence; that a great man belongs, by virtue of his greatness, to all who stand in need of him. But her eyes were often dim with longing. As for him, when sometimes at a late hour he passed to his rooms down the wide road that led beneath her window, he would look up and see the lamp burning, and know that she was waiting there. But he could not go to her—could not, for very shame of the thoughts that had assailed him.

For in the great social world where they claimed him, the world where people marry and are given in marriage day by day, there, nevertheless, was widely spreading the influence of a pseudo-philosophical set, who held that marriage was the death of genius, the tomb of romance, indeed the tomb of most things that go to make life worth living. And some of the poverty of this kind of thinking had entered into Dick, and taken from his manliness. Until there happened the pitiful little tragedy which perhaps is best told very briefly.

There was in society that season, an Austrian woman of beauty, birth, learning, and a great individual charm, and between Dick and

this woman there sprang up a strong and sudden feeling, for which friendship somehow seems too noble and true a word. In the autumn she bade him come to her for a long stay at her country house in Hungary. There was to be hunting, shooting, fishing, society, all of the best—amongst the latter the great Russian novelist, whose name is proverbial. And Dick went.

No one perhaps will ever know exactly how or why it all chanced to come about. But one day a letter was brought to Angela as she sat at her work, and when she had finished reading it a great blackness and blindness came over her and it seemed as though the light of her life went out. For long hours she sat there, motionless, stupefied, her head resting on her hand. When the afternoon was far spent she went over to the window, but a great thick, cold, mist had arisen and she could not see that other window far across the space. In the agony of the night, she remembered, that in that awful little letter, he had implored her to send him one word of mercy, of forgiveness for having left her, for having injured and laid her life so low. She got up, and took sheet on sheet of paper, but could accomplish nothing. Her hand had never penned him aught but words through which there breathed the tenderest love—it could not do it now. She thought the whole thing out, and in the cold, grey morning she went to the post-office, and wired to him across the continent—three little words alone :

“Dear, I understand.”

Once Angela had heard a story of a captain whose ship had struck a rock one night in a wild and passionate storm. When he saw that life was practically over, he went to his cabin and returned swiftly in full uniform, his medals pinned to his breast, his sword unsheathed and in his hand. And thus, proudly, bravely, he met his death.

The idea came to her that Dick, if he ever thought of her—and she was sure he did—would be best pleased if he knew that she was meeting, not her death, but what is sometimes even harder, her death-in-life, in like manner to the captain of that story.

There slowly came a transfigured look in her eyes, which were growing large and bright with pain ; and in her voice there was often a far-away sound which told that her joy was not in the things of this present ; otherwise there was little change. She was brave, and gay, and smiling, and well-beloved by the few who knew her. But her sorrow was known to none. She might have said, as one has sung :

“I have a room where into no one enters,
Save I myself alone :
There sits a blessed memory on a throne,
There my life centres.”

It had been the wish of both of them to keep their engagement from the world—a sweet and sacred time for themselves alone ; so she was spared the pity of her friends, in this her hour of tribulation. Had

she read the papers, she might have noticed in certain of the early November copies a little paragraph setting forth "with deep regret" the news that that brilliant young author of promise and performance, Dick Clayton, had been wounded in a duel fought in Hungary; that, as a result, he had entirely lost the sight of one eye, while that of the other was gravely feared for. But when at nights, wearied with the long day's work, she found a little hour for reading, it was in the books that Dick himself had given her that she sought her solace and sustinment, while the thousand small events of the day passed unheeded and unread by her.

One bright cold afternoon just before Christmas, as she was returning from her daily walk, she saw coming towards her, up the hill, a large motherly form which she soon recognised to be that of Dick's old landlady. It seemed a strangely joyful thing to her that she might speak a passing word to one whom Dick had spoken to; and, almost before she knew it, her hands were in the big kind clasp of the good woman who had been the bearer of so many messages between herself and him in the bygone days.

Then she heard, how only a week or so before, they had brought her dearest one back all blind, and weak, and pain-struck: how he lay with his sightless eyes turned ever to where her window was, across the space; how he could not write and would have none to read to him, but just lay there in loneliness and darkness until the day was done.

"He do stand, miss, in sore need o' you, he do, though whether I'm a-sayin' it as shouldn't, I don't know: but I reckon, miss, I do, that he's a-standin' in sore need o' you."

Then Angela's heart was smitten with a torture it had never known before—since of his own free will and word he had put her from his life for ever. But when she got back to her room, all the evening, all the night, and all the day that followed, she could do nothing but say to herself: "Dick is there—in pain and blindness—and in sore need of me."

She noticed the poor blind people taking their exercise up and down the long walled-in garden across the road. A terrible desolation struck her at a thought—what if Dick, her dearest one, should come to that—to that? There was a poor old man whom Angela from her window often watched. He kept aloof from his afflicted brothers. In the summer he worked at baskets and wicker-chairs in the sunshine: in the winter he paced the walks with sad and heavy steps. They told her he had once been famous. Oh, Dick! Oh, Dick

The great Conservatoire was very still, but outside the bells were ringing, and carts laden with evergreens and holly were passing up and down the hard glittering road, for it was the eve of Christmas Day—the day when Angela was to have gone forth in bridal bravery

to meet her love. She remembered how once in tender seriousness he had said to her :

"When that day comes, whatever happens, you will not fail me, angel mine : you will come to me for better, or for worse?"

And she had answered that she would not fail.

Before the early misty twilight fell, she had fought the battle royal and done violence to herself. God had given her the last of the three great things that go to make the glorious trinity of a woman's love : loyalty, perfect comprehension, and humility.

In the dusk and the frosty gloom, she went to her stricken love. She would sooner and more easily have died for him, but since that could not be, she knew that she would live for him. By his side she knelt ; there, where he sick and sightless lay, she held her arms towards him, saying only :

"Dearest, I have not failed you. I have come."

KATHLEEN WATSON.

FINIS.

"FINIS,"—he closed a blotted page,

And, seeing naught but failure, wept ;

Then dropped his weary head, and slept,

For he had cares on him, and age.

Where the last line was trembling writ

The sad tears fell, and washed the word :

Came ONE, and saw the margin blurred—

And stooped, and wrote afresh on it.

He woke. Is this the setting sun,

Or the red birth of the new day ?

That sends a glorious, golden ray

Across the legend "Chapter One" !

G. B. STUART,

THE FIELD OF ISANDHLWANA.*

BY LIEUT.-COLONEL MAHONY, C.M.G.

THE troop ship *Ontario* was lying at the South Pier jetty in Portsmouth Dockyard in readiness to embark the 1st Battalion Cardiff Volunteers, momentarily expected alongside by train from Aldershot.

On the poop of the vessel an officer was standing in a moody attitude, regarding two persons, a lady and a gentleman, who were in earnest conversation on the pier; the gentleman was in the undress uniform of the Cardiff Regiment, as was also the observer on the ship.

After a while the whistle of the advancing train was heard, and presently it drew up on the siding. The couple on the jetty then took a hasty farewell, as the vessel was under orders to proceed to sea the moment the last man had been embarked. The lady, dropping a thick veil over her face to hide the fast-falling tears, fell back a space and joined an elderly woman who stood a little apart, and together they waited till the ship had been loosed from its moorings and passed into the fair way of the harbour, continuing to wave adieus as long as answering signals could be observed from the ship; after which they took their departure, the young lady sobbing bitterly.

Captain Beauchamp had only been married to the lady from whom he had just parted about a fortnight, when, owing to disturbances at the Cape, he had been recalled from his honeymoon trip, the regiment to which he belonged having been placed under immediate orders for active service.

The story of their love was a romantic one, and not altogether unattended by some unpleasantness. Milly Clarkson lived with an invalid sister and an old attached servant, or, more properly, a humble friend. They lived at Dover, and were fairly well off. Milly, the younger of the two sisters, was an accomplished artist, and, while sitting one day at an open window, the breeze caught one of her sketches, and wafted it into the street below; this being observed by two gentlemen passing, one of them ran quickly forward, closely followed by his companion, and managed to secure it, just as the young lady had opened the door to search for the errant sketch. She thanked them very sweetly for their attention, and they on their part, having now an opportunity of observing her more nearly, were greatly struck by her beauty, and considered themselves fortunate in being able to render this slight service.

After the interchange of a few polite speeches the gentlemen took their leave.

* Isandula.

Major Verdon and Captain Beauchamp of the Cardiff Regiment were fast friends, shared all amusements together, and were inseparable off duty, and when practicable took leave of absence at the same time, living always on the best and happiest terms ; and this continued unbrokenly until the occurrence of the incident narrated above.

The friends subsequently made the usual formal call, and were received very warmly by the sisters. This was succeeded by other visits, which ultimately developed into great intimacy, causing, unfortunately, for the first time, a break in the hitherto close companionship of the two officers, who took to making calls separately, each endeavouring to avoid the other on such occasions. But in the end it became clear to Major Verdon that he was the one too many at their pleasant re-unions. He was a very self-contained man, but with an outward demeanour of calmness he kept the fiercest passions in check ; he viewed with very bitter feelings the favour shown to his friend, having for the first time in his life fallen head over ears in love.

By degrees, however, he dropped off visiting the family, and the estrangement between himself and Captain Beauchamp slowly but surely widened, until at last they scarcely ever met except on duty.

Although fully anticipating it, he did not hear without a pang that Beauchamp and Miss Clarkson were engaged ; but when the marriage took place, he obtained leave of absence, pleading pressing business for not attending the ceremony. He felt a vague sort of exultation when the order came for the regiment to proceed on active service, though he could scarcely define to himself how or why his satisfaction arose.

Major Verdon was the onlooker of the farewell interview between husband and wife.

The ship sped on its voyage, but nothing of any consequence occurred during the passage, the whilom friends maintaining a studied distance towards each other, never coming in contact except when the necessities of the service compelled them to meet.

On arriving at Simon's Bay they were detained for a few days to coal, and also to embark some reinforcement drafts awaiting them from the Cape Town garrison.

During their detention the officers were permitted to go on shore, and they rambled over the high table-land and rocky eminences in the vicinity. In one of these rambles Captain Beauchamp came across an ostrich farm, and feeling a curiosity to ascertain the *modus operandi* by which these huge birds were kept in subjection, and learn something of the method followed to obtain the valuable feathers of the biped, he stepped across the narrow boundary which confined them to the limits of the farm.

He had hardly entered the enclosure when an ostrich came quickly towards him ; and being a man fond of animals and birds, he went unsuspectingly forward with the intention of petting him and stroking his long neck, being evidently unaware of the occasional outbursts of

savage temper to which these birds give way, though they are easily managed by their regular attendants, mostly little Kaffir boys. As they approached each other—the Captain entertaining no misgivings—the ostrich raised one of his powerful forefeet, and struck the officer full on the breast, knocking him clean over, and breaking his collar-bone. Rising with difficulty, he defended himself as best he could with his walking-stick; but would no doubt have been seriously injured, if not killed, had not Mr. Van Rensburg, the owner of the farm (who fortunately chanced to catch sight of the encounter), rushed up and rescued him.

The injured officer warmly thanked this gentleman, who assisted him to his house, and had his hurts attended to, and also despatched a messenger to the ship to explain the cause of his detention.

"But, mynheer," said the hospitable Dutchman later on, "what a strange thing that one of your officers was looking on from behind a hedge of prickly pear at a time when you were in real danger, lying on the ground, and in a position where you might have been kicked to death, and did not stir to your assistance."

"What do you say?" replied Beauchamp. "An English officer! impossible! you must be mistaken."

"No mistake, Herr Captain; and little Jan Noote, my herd-boy, told me he was running towards you when the Rooibatje (red soldier) standing behind the hedge, held him back. He brought me this stick," he continued, turning towards an inner room, "which the gentleman dropped in the sluit hard by, whence it was carried down by the stream; the boy recovered it subsequently."

Beauchamp looked at the stick, and recognised it as one he had often seen in possession of Major Verdon.

"I should like to take this, Herr Rensburg, if you will permit me," said the officer.

"Ya! certainly, mynheer," replied the Dutchman; "take it and welcome."

In due course a conveyance arrived, in which were the doctor and one of his brother officers, and they all three (after the injured officer's wounds had been attended to) returned on board, as the ship was to sail early on the following morning for East London, where they were under orders to disembark, and proceed to King William's Town.

At this station they arrived late one night.

The following morning they were again *en route*, making for the Perie Forest, a mountainous, thickly-wooded tract of country to which the old Gaika chief, Sandilli, had retired with some two thousand men of his tribe, occupying the strong positions of Murray's Krantz and Gozo heights, the latter a flat-topped hill of great natural strength where every approach was commanded.

To this point the Cardiff Regiment was directed to march, and on arrival, the Colonel invested the place as closely as the troops at his

command would permit ; but notwithstanding the heavy fire that was brought to bear, all their efforts failed to drive the old Unkose from his fastness. Captain Beauchamp had perforce to be left behind for the present, but just before the regiment marched off, he stepped out on the barrack square, his arm still in a sling, watching the preparations, and chafing at his own inactivity.

Major Verdon coming up at this juncture, halted irresolutely for awhile ; then addressing Beauchamp said, in a sneering tone :

"You're lucky not to be coming out just now ; it's rather warm work at the front ; Saltmarshe and another fellow of the 90th were killed yesterday and a lot of their men. But you were always lucky, you know ; even ostriches don't hurt you much."

"Stay a moment," replied the other coldly. "I've something belonging to you," and turning into his quarters, he re-appeared in a couple of minutes with the stick given to him by the Dutch farmer. Major Verdon had been joined by two or three other officers by this time, and his back was towards Beauchamp. As the latter approached, he turned round, and catching sight of the stick, became deadly pale. His once friend went close up to him, and in a low voice, said : "This was found in the sluit behind the prickly-pear hedge on Van Rensburg's farm. The Kaffir boy," he added, meaningly, "recovered it."

The Major answered not a word, but taking the stick (which from its peculiar shape was well known to belong to him) he handed it to his orderly and joined the battalion, now formed up for marching. The observers looked curiously on, knowing there was (as they phrased it) "something up," but not understanding the situation, as Beauchamp had not mentioned to any one what the Dutchman had told him.

After a week's detention at King William's Town he declared himself well enough to take over the command of his company, and was consequently drafted to the front, where he found the regiment in the situation previously described.

One wing of the corps under command of Major Verdon was extended in a zigzag direction up the side of the cliff, which embraced the forest land at the foot of Gozo heights. Here the fire was very brisk, and all lay close down except the Colonel, who appeared to disdain the shelter he had himself enjoined upon those under his command, sauntering from point to point with the greatest nonchalance.

At this juncture an aide-de-camp came spurring up the rocky way, and, saluting the Colonel, said :

"The General wishes you to send a company from your right to search the wood towards the Zwagerhoek ; Major Buller has gone with a party to try and cut a path round to the summit if possible, the men of his rear guard have been lost sight of, and it is necessary we should be in communication with them ; the officer in command of the party you send must be instructed to look out for Buller, and reinforce him if necessary."

"Major Verdon," said the Colonel addressing that officer, "detail a company of your wing for an advance by way of the drift."

Now the drift was a crossing which led directly into the bush, and except in the rainy season had but a few inches of water flowing across its sandy bed. It was the most exposed part of the position, and the Cardiff Regiment had been posted on the right and left of it. It was fully commanded by the enemy, as all attempts to pass between the wings on either side, brought down a hail of bullets, cutting up the sand in small showers, and leaving the usual leaden smears on the rocky boulders around.

Major Verdon, after saluting his superior, went off at a quick pace to the right of his line, a strange light in his eye.

"Captain Beauchamp," he said, addressing that officer, "advance with your company by way of the drift, open communication with Major Buller, and re-inforce him should he require it."

"We shall lose heavily in crossing," I fear, was the Captain's reply, "as the place is so exposed; and I think——"

"Am I to tell the Colonel," said the other interrupting, "that you think the service too dangerous?"

"I was about to add," returned the Captain coldly, "that it would be as well to have the ambulance at hand, as I shall be certain to lose a number of men; that was my——"

"Oh! we'll take care of that," retorted the Major. "Don't be afraid," he added with a sneer.

Stung by the innuendo conveyed in this last phrase, the young officer replied hotly: "You shall answer to me for this, Major Verdon, when the campaign is over; I'll submit to insult from no man."

Before anything further could be said, the Colonel came up, and addressing Captain Beauchamp, told him not to expose his men unnecessarily, but to make a dash across the open for the thick scrub at the base of the hill before commencing his search. Clenching his teeth he turned towards his company, and forming them in extended order he waited a favourable opportunity. Presently his voice rang out:

"Prepare to advance! double!" and at the head of his men he went with a rush across the open.

Before reaching the cover in front he lost twenty men; the bugler at his side was shot dead, and he himself had a narrow escape, a bullet passing through his helmet. Then with the remainder of the company he vanished in the thick underwood, an occasional shot indicating their whereabouts from time to time.

It may here be stated that Buller* succeeded, after immense difficulties, in cutting a way to the top of the hitherto inaccessible stronghold of the Gaika chief, by which the heights were subsequently stormed, and the scattered remnant of the once formidable tribe streamed away towards the Amotalas. Sandelli (all the old fire and spirit departed) told them to leave him as he could go no further—his heart was

* Now Sir Redvers Buller.

broken. One Induna remained with him, in whose arms he died that night, and the English gave him reverent and honourable interment.

But events were marching onwards in South Africa. Hardly had this comparatively insignificant outbreak been quelled, when news reached King William's Town that Sir Bartle Frere had handed over Zululand to be dealt with by Lord Chelmsford, and the Cardiff Regiment, with all the other disposable force in the old Colony, were hurriedly embarked for Natal, where on arrival no time was lost in despatching them to the front.

A clear bright morning and that *souppçon* of cold in the air which is found so invigorating in the early dawn of a South African day, before the sun has obtained its greater power. The high tableland of Helpmakaar was crowded with marching troops, active members of the staff, and busy transport officers, all *en route* for the steep irregular defile doing duty for a road that led to Rorke's Drift, where it was intended to establish a depot of supplies for the main body about to cross the Buffalo into Zululand.

A short march over the open flat brought them to the head of the pass, and then commenced the difficult task of getting heavily-armed men, waggons laden with ammunition and stores, ambulance waggons, etc., down a precipitous boulder-choked way, presenting almost insuperable difficulties to their onward progress.

It was an ideal position for an ambushade, and had the Zulu leader been an enterprising character, it is not too much to imagine that no man of the force would have lived to reach the drift. However, they arrived in safety at the river's bank, and leaving one company under command of Lieutenant Bromhead posted in the missionaries' house, the crossing was safely effected by means of a punt. Marching inland for ten miles, the General ordered a halt at the foot, and under the shadow of Isandhlwana Hill, where Major Verdon was left in immediate charge of certain companies of the regiment, the whole party that were ordered to encamp there being under the command of Colonel Pulleine; while Lord Chelmsford pushed on to the left, where his scouts had reported the main body of the Zulu force was posted.

We have not to do here with the well-worn story of "Isandula" (as it is erroneously called). It is now known that the General, recognised by the army as an able and accomplished soldier, was badly served by the Intelligence Department; for, although several columns of the Zulu army lay ensconced in dongas, running transversely in his front and right, no one, whose duty it was to ascertain, appeared to have the slightest knowledge of the circumstance, and the General with his staff moved off, in full confidence that he would come up with the enemy during the morning's march.

What happened is now a matter of history, and it is only with an episode of the calamitous affair we have at present to deal.

About an hour after the headquarters had marched, sounds of

heavy firing were heard in front, and the brave but ill-fated Colonel Durnford, who was in advance with his personal following of mounted Basutos, soon became alive to the true state of affairs, and sent in a pressing request for reinforcements. These were promptly despatched, but the forces opposed were so numerous, and the several companies so unavoidably scattered, that they were powerless to contend successfully against the odds opposed; notwithstanding, they fought with desperate courage to the last, and were slain to a man.

Captain Beauchamp had been ordered to take up a position about three-quarters of a mile to the left front, while a second company under Captain Mostyn was moved to the right in prolongation of the line, following the curves of a deep ravine. Major Verdon was specially detailed to command both companies in the forward movement; and accordingly, placing himself at their head, he moved promptly towards the point indicated.

Suddenly from out of the ravine (or donga) they were approaching, there swarmed thousands of Zulus, armed for the most part with assegais, though a large number carried fire-arms, wearing a rude kind of bandolier strung across their naked shoulders. On came the foe in their favourite formation when opposed to a weaker body: one central mass, from which were despatched to the right and left, a stream of braves extending swiftly in a crescent form, being re-inforced from time to time, until the two horns joined and crushed the doomed men within its folds.

At the commencement of these movements, Captain Beauchamp, with true soldierly instinct, saw that the best to be done was to join forces with Mostyn, as divided they would be at considerable disadvantage, and in pursuance of this idea began gradually to take ground to the right; but while he was in the act of doing so, Major Verdon rode furiously up, exclaiming:

"What are you doing, Captain Beauchamp? Keep your ground why do you move without orders?"

It was at this moment the Zulus burst in view, and the Captain, without a word, pointed in their direction, adding briefly:

"I was about to re-inforce Mostyn."

"If you move another step, I'll send you to the rear a prisoner; you seem to be a little too careful of yourself, sir," he added, contemptuously. Then in a loud voice: "There is the enemy; do your duty," and he rode away.

The contemplated movement was by this time impossible, so forming his men in a hollow square he faced the opposing hosts with that cool courage and determination which has ever been the distinguishing features of the English officer in moments of peril.

But, alas! from the first their case was hopeless, and when every man of the company lay dead around, he, though severely wounded, fought manfully on, using sword and revolver, his dauntless bearing eliciting shouts of admiration from even his savage assailants.

At length an assegai was thrown which entered his chest, this (as related by a chief subsequently) he seized and twisted out of the wound,* shooting the man who had launched it, and then dropped exhausted on the pile of dead around, when he was finally despatched.

Meanwhile Mostyn was attacked in a similar manner, and was joined by the Major, who, to give him his due, was as brave as a lion, but the odds were enormous and they gradually succumbed, fighting doggedly on till no living man of the force remained, and there they lay on that blood-soaked ground, exposed to all the changes of the elements, for four long months till re-inforcements having arrived from England the country was again occupied, when their bleached remains were sorrowfully interred ; a church now marking the spot where so many gallant hearts ceased to beat.

Sad to say, the effect on Mrs. Beauchamp was disastrous ; she was in the street when the first news of the massacre reached England, and, hastening to hear the nature of the "News from South Africa," bawled out by the newspaper vendors, was just in time to hear her husband's name read out amongst the killed, and fell senseless to the ground. She never rallied from the shock, and until her death (which occurred soon after) was under the delusion that the old letters received from her husband previous to his death had arrived by the last mail, and would proceed to tell any casual visitor the news they contained.

Major Verdon's action since the first estrangement took place between the friends could only be accounted for in one way : of a really generous disposition, it is supposed that his feelings became so overwrought at seeing his friend preferred by one with whom he was himself madly in love, his mind had given way, urging him to acts that were foreign to his real nature.

Both men fell on that fatal January morning, and their bones lay whitening on the plain within a few yards of each other until the last mournful rites had been performed over them, and those others, their companions in death, whose lives, loves, hopes, and ambitions had perished on the bloody field of Isandhlwana.

* Fact.



THE STREGA'S CURSE.

BY LADY MARGARET MAJENDIE.

CHAPTER XV.

COLOMBA went back to Lalla's little house and lay down on her hard, narrow bed. She had an almost mechanical instinct that rest was necessary to enable her to go through her work that night, and her journey the next day.

She fell into a profound and dreamless sleep. Hours passed, and it was past midnight, when the latch was raised, and old Lalla let herself in.

She struck a light and came forward to Cola's bedside.

The girl stirred uneasily in her sleep, and when Lalla let the light flare in her face, she sat up and looked at her, comprehension slowly dawning in her magnificent sleepy eyes.

"I have done what you wished, my beauty," said the old woman ; "I have got it here safely. You have only to pay me the promised price and it is yours."

"You are sure, quite sure, that it will prove fatal?"

"You distrust me, foolish girl? You forget that for years, from all parts of the country, people have come to me for tokens of my power. Do you remember Lippo?"

"Remember Lippo? Was he not my playfellow?"

"Do you remember the year in which Lippo went off for a soldier, and wrote back word that the innkeeper's daughter at San Domenico had blue eyes, and hair like Madonna's own? Think you that that letter was not as wormwood to some young hearts in Maiano, and that one at least did not come to Lalla, clever, kind Lalla, for revenge? Do you remember his return?"

Colomba shivered and moaned. One bright winter's morning, when the snow was on the tall mountain-tops, the young soldier had come home with hollow cheeks and brilliant fever-lighted eyes; a cough that gave him no rest or peace, till he laid his head on his mother's breast and died.

"It was your doing?" she cried, recoiling.

"Not mine. What has poor Lalla to do with it? She does not apply her own remedies. She sells the means of revenge. It is not my affair. Let those look to it who make use of them. They are swift and sure. It is in your own power even now to withdraw, but listen, my beauty. When Lippo went down the mountain with the light heart and oft-changing love of a soldier-life, he left no wife, no

deserted love to curse him ; his death was brought about by simple jealousy. He had never done as other men have done, gone through a mockery of marriage, blighted the whole life, past, present and future, of one who might have been a queen in her great beauty—turned her into the scorn and scoff of all the place, gone off gaily to wed, perhaps in earnest, with some dark-eyed girl with white hands and glittering rings, one more fit to mate with him, as she would understand his momentary folly, pardon and laugh over it with him."

"Stop ! stop !" cried Cola. "Say no more or you will drive me mad ; and I have so much to do, so much that with all my power I must keep my senses. Here, take your price. Give me the horrible deadly thing."

She sat up and began to unbind the two great plaits of her hair.

"Shall not I cut them off as they are?" said the Strega eagerly. "Why unfasten them?"

"Have you scissors or shears strong enough to cut through?" said the girl. "They are very thick and strong."

"They are magnificent," said the old woman. "Are you not sorry to part with them?"

Colomba shook her head. "Why should I care now?" she said.

A momentary regret had crossed even Lalla's mind as with knife and scissors alternately she hacked her way through the great plaits. She knew that they would be worth a large sum of money to the barber, who would soon be coming to Maiano again, and who would never know that they were severed from the head of the woman he had long adored, because she would have left the place.

"There, that is done," said the girl, passing her hand through the short thick locks that were left. "My head feels light and cool."

"They will grow again."

"Perhaps, but it does not matter now. Give me the thing. Tell me how I must use it."

Lalla put a little square box into her hands—a box perhaps a foot or fourteen inches square, locked with a key.

"You will find directions as to use when the time comes," she said. "Meanwhile, my beauty, you have your work cut out for you ; you have to find him."

Cola did not answer, she thrust the box under her pillow and lay back.

"I am going to sleep now," she said.

"Colomba," said the old woman eagerly. "If you dream to-night, tell me your dream—I wish to take numbers in the lottery—and a dream with one's head on the Strega's work will bring good luck. You will give me your dream?"

"Let me sleep," cried the girl ; "I do not want to dream. I want rest ; I want to forget."

She closed her eyes, and in one moment fell once more into profound slumber.

Lalla extinguished the light, and crept into her own bed.

It was a strangely godless house. There was not a single picture or image of saint or Madonna, no crucifix to sanctify the hearth, no shell for holy water. In no other house in the village, possibly in all the country, was there such absence of all that could consecrate.

When Colomba lay down to sleep, though she said no words of prayer, her hand mechanically obeyed the force of holy custom, and she signed herself with the cross. That was all that stood between her and all unholy influences on that dark night.

Colomba passed from the heavy stillness of perfect insensibility, into the strange dream world; so weird, sometimes so beautiful, always so piteously unprofitable.

Dreams are very cruel, sometimes bringing back such vivid pictures of lost happiness, that awakening is the sharpest agony poor human nature can endure; sometimes refusing altogether, with obstinate denial, to bring such small pitiful solace as that faint uncertain imagery could give.

The dream-world was very strange and weird to Colomba that night. She seemed to be entering into a region that was intensely, wonderfully bright. Her feet trod as it were on air or clouds, something so strong and fresh and buoyant, that the very sense of motion was glorious. Just in front of her, standing in this luminous glow of light, without background or any of the accessories of earthly landscape, a figure, standing like her own on clouds and in space, a form which she recognised as the one joy and love of her life, her young husband Livio.

She held out her arms to him with a little cry, and the cry seemed to be taken up, and to re-echo from side to side, all round her everywhere, with a clamour of sound which caused her acute terror. He came swiftly towards her, and she tried to meet his hands, but they were impalpable; he was but a ghost; there was no touch possible; only an overpowering glory of great happiness, that once more she saw him face to face.

Colomba tried to speak to him again, but the fearful resounding echoes caught up her words, and in terror she was silent. He held out his hand; she could not touch or feel it, but she was conscious of being wafted on faster and faster, through this brilliant unresisting space, till quite suddenly, the wind became cold and biting. She found that Livio's hand in hers was becoming real and strong; then her feet were conscious of solidity. There was a thick ice-cold fog which enveloped them, and when it cleared away, they were standing on firm land, a wonderfully fair and beautiful land, and something seemed to tell her that they had alighted on a new star.

"Livio, darling, are we to live here? To make this a new and perfect home?"

But he did not answer. He only looked at her, always out of his great sorrowful eyes.

"Livio!"

He bent forward. He did not speak, but through her mind flashed his answer to her cry: "There is that in your possession that must keep us ever apart—the Strega's curse."

Colomba woke with so wild a cry of anguish, that old Lalla leapt to her feet.

"You have been dreaming?" she cried eagerly. "Do not forget it; tell me at once—at once, Cola."

"I will not! why do you torment me? Am I not miserable enough?"

"You shall tell me! I have done all I possibly can for you. You shall not throw me over thus! Tell me your dream."

"I dreamed that Maddalena and I were lost on the bleak side of Monte Ceteri, and that we fought for our lives with wolves. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes, yes; I am more than satisfied. Go to sleep in peace."

"Lalla," said Cola, "have you no crucifix? not even a rosary you could lend me? I am afraid."

"No, no; go to sleep."

"No cross?"

"Lie down and be still."

With a faint moan the girl obeyed.

Early the next morning Lalla was up and about. She went to an old carved oak chest, that stood in a corner of her room, and threw it open. It was full of the old rubbish that, sooner or later, finds its way down to the curiosity shops. There were rolls of silk damask, plentifully bespattered with wax, which betrayed that they had once been church hangings; there were broken ivories, a tangled mass of silver fringe, a black Byzantine saint, or tavola, some strings of glass beads, and worthless lava earrings; and from the midst of it all, wrapt up in a bundle of old yellow Greek lace, she drew out the treasured *Libro de Sogni*, the popular guide to the great public lotteries.

It was a curious book full of engravings of every event, every creature, every idea that could cross the human imagination, arranged alphabetically; every event, every substantive bearing its corresponding number.

Lalla turned over the pages rapidly, and selected three subjects:—wolves, No. 40062; sister, No. 8910; mountain, No. 12444. Very quickly she wrote down these numbers.

She was still engaged in doing so, when she saw that Colomba was awake, and was watching her.

"Is that the book of dreams?" she said.

"Yes, my beauty. I am making my choice of numbers."

"Will you let me do so also?"

"Yes, yes."

Colomba took the book, and turned over the leaves. "What shall I choose?" she said.

"I cannot advise; one must choose for oneself."

Then Colomba made her selection. She looked out star, space, strega, and wrote down their corresponding numbers.

"And now I must dress," she said. "I shall go straight to the diligence; perhaps Maddalena will come there to see me off."

"And you will say no farewells, not even to your father?"

Colomba clenched her hands. "Be silent," she said; "remember that. As for me, I never forget."

CHAPTER XVI

It was evening, a grey soft evening in the late autumn before the early winter frosts had set in. The tender colouring suited the tints of the Val d'Arno, always grey and white with the shimmering silver of the olive groves, when the wind blew through them. All was of that uniform silvery tint; a landscape tenderly pencilled rather than painted; except on the distant horizon, where, under the cloudy veil of smoke-coloured clouds, there was a clear shining sky of the palest primrose yellow.

Through the narrow lanes of this fair Val d'Arno, lanes fenced in with great stone pargetted walls, a little *carritella* was driving with the rapidity of the wind.

Don Giacomo Baldara was a rich man; he possessed the usual complement of heavily-built state carriages, with clumsy over-fed horses; but he never used them when he could help it, he would always drive himself in this favourite mountain-cart, as light as a feather, and drawn by a little eager high-bred pony, thin and swift as a greyhound, with gaily jingling bells on its harness, and a fox's brush mounted in silver under its chin. Little Biondino was so high couraged that she could not bear to be pulled up and made to walk when they came to the sudden steep hills.

This evening old Don Giacomo was coming home in great enjoyment, for he was bringing with him his young friend and supreme favourite Gian.

Don Giacomo had so much to say, that it was delightful to have a listener; and such a listener! one who was always ready with his cordial sympathy with every interest, as well as every crisis in life.

The little pony sped on, and Gian could only just edge in a question he was most anxious to ask.

"And tell me, my friend," he said—"just only tell me this, how is Livio?"

"Livio! why he is well again; still a little languid, of course, enough to be interesting. He lies on the sofa in the evening, and my sister pets him; he is beginning to look more like himself, now that he has only his black moustache."

"Then he has shaved?" said Gian, so eagerly that Don Giacomo

laughed: "It seems to be a matter of consummate importance then! yes, he has shaved; I am sorry, the beard hid the thinness of his face. Aimée, you know, has gone."

"Gone! where?"

"Only back to the convent. She missed a whole *trimestre*, and the superior was in a great fuss about it. She is educated enough for my taste, but her aunt is not yet satisfied."

"I am sorry that I shall not see her," said Gian absently.

"Well, to return to what I was saying, my friend; I think that I have made the best bargain I ever made in my life. You know, at least you have heard me speak of Nino Dori's work?"

"Scappi's partner! oh, yes, it is very well-known now. So his prices are not yet exorbitant. I am surprised. I hear that even in England they are asking for his work."

"Listen then; to me, his prices will never be exorbitant, for it is I, even I myself, that have been the making of him. I have been for more than two hours at his *atelier* to-day. He is doing a jewel-casket for me, and he will not stick to it. He is doing at the same time stalls for a great church at Vienna, panels for some Englishman, a cabinet for the Aldobrandini, and my casket. When I ask how it gets on, all he will say is 'Vossignoria knows that the work is very minute; my eyes are my fortune—I must be careful.'"

"Has he promised it for any given time?"

"No; he will not. 'Vossignoria knows,' the rascal says, 'that if I promise a thing I must fulfil it; therefore I make no promises.'"

"That is an honest man," said Gian, laughing.

"Yes, yes, honest enough. Well, to-day, as I sat watching him at work—not at my work, *per Bacco!* but at the great alto-relievo stalls of his German church—I saw something very remarkable."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed. You say you have been to Scappi's house. Did you ever see any of the women-folk?"

"Oh, yes; a little fat tub of a wife sometimes answers the door; Nino calls her Pippa."

"Bah! There is in that house a beauty such as has not lived in Florence since the days of Raphael."

"And you saw her?"

"I was, as I tell you, sitting by Nino, tormenting him for his remissness in not doing my work first, while he worked on without a word of excuse, the villain, when the door was thrown open, and in came this vision of beauty."

"What was she like?" said Gian, smiling at his old friend's enthusiasm.

"Like! I nearly fell off my chair at the sight of her. She is a Juno, tall, magnificent, with the great ox-eyes of classic fame, a mouth shaped in the lines of perfect beauty, full rounded chin. She was dressed in a long gown of dark chesnut-coloured velvet, she had

diamond rings on her fingers. The curious thing was that her hair was cut quite short, the only mistake in her most perfect knowledge of the way to make the most of her grand beauty ; it was in thick short locks, waved rather than curled all over her head—it was an incongruity."

"And who was the splendid dame—a model?"

"It is a most curious and romantic story," said Don Giacomo, in his eagerness shaking the reins so that sensitive little Biondino made a bound in the air which caused the little carriage to dance.

"This girl is not a lady at all ; in spite of her splendid gown and diamonds she is only a *contadina*. You know that Dori himself is not town-bred ; he comes from a quarryman's village in the hills, called Maiano."

All the half-lazy indifference with which Gian had been listening to his old friend vanished at the sound of that name ; he started into an upright position.

"Maiano !" he exclaimed—"this girl comes from Maiano?"

"Yes. Do you know the place?"

"I have been there. Go on with your story."

"It is a strange one. The girl's name is Colomba Bondi. She is some sort of relation of Nino's, a *fiancée* perhaps, though he denies that, and was sulky when I attempted to speak of it to him. This girl, the daughter of poor stone-cutters in that mountain village, is now a rich heiress ; she has won the great prize in the lottery."

"O Heaven !"

It was an involuntary exclamation. The strange, almost incredible news was perfectly terrible to Gian. Colomba in Florence ! Colomba rich and powerful, no longer hidden and buried with all her sorrows and her wrongs in her isolated village home. What would happen now ? In the strength and insolence of her new wealth, would not all the coarse want of civilisation, that had been so hateful to him, become a thousand times more hateful ? He shuddered so sharply that his old friend turned to him, anxiously asked him whether he felt chilled, and commented on his ghastly paleness.

In the uneasiness of his spirit Gian answered impatiently :

"It is nothing, my friend. I am interested in this strange story of yours. What does this haughty beauty intend to do with her wealth and loveliness ?"

"She is a girl of some character," said Don Giacomo, smiling. "She is anxious to be educated, so Nino tells me, and when that is accomplished, who knows ?"

"Will she not marry Nino Dori ?"

"Nino ! the poor hunchback ! How can you imagine such an impossibility ! but then, you have not seen her ! Well, here we are ! See ! Christina and Livio are on the steps to welcome you. Cola ! I have brought him," he shouted cheerily as little Biondino made a spirited dart round the corner, and drew up before the wide steps of the villa with a suddenness that made all her little bells clash.

"Welcome! welcome!" cried Livio coming down the steps, while Signora Christina stood waiting with smiling face and outstretched hands.

Both exclaimed at Gian's looks; and indeed he was very pale, and there was an odd look about him that might have been taken for fear or timidity if he had not been among such intimate and loving friends.

Poor Gian! the burden of his secret had taken all the bright joyousness out of his youth. He was an anxious careworn man, easily startled, always carrying about with him the secret dread of a discovery which would alienate from him his best friends; for would Livio (whom he loved as a dear brother) ever forgive him for the lie which had made of him an unconscious traitor to the woman who should have been his wife.

Livio looked very delicate still, and it was very evident that his strength was far from being re-established. Even this moment in the chill evening air alarmed his mother, and in spite of his laughing protestations she hurried him in.

While Gian was changing his dress before dinner, the one thought was absorbing his mind. Don Giacomo was quite sure to tell over and over again the story of the beautiful contadina whom he had seen in Nino's *atelier*. Would the names re-awaken any of the lost chords in Livio's memory? It seemed to him an absolute impossibility that they should fail to do so. The very name of Colomba had conjured up in his own mind so extraordinarily vivid a recollection of her. He could see her in his imagination as he had seen her first, leaning against the dark carouba tree, with the scarlet japonica flowers in her dark hair—he could hear the loud undisciplined tones with their hissing Tuscan accent which used to set his teeth on edge. It was all so vivid to him, that how could it be possible that all should have been so completely blotted out from Livio's memory? The drops of perspiration broke out on his brow and his teeth chattered as he nerved himself to go down and face what must inevitably come.

CHAPTER XVII.

DINNER was ready when Gian went down, and Don Giacomo conducted his sister-in-law to her place while the two young men followed; Livio in high spirits at the arrival of his friend, Gian trying with all his might to conceal his perturbation and control his twitching lips.

During the first part of dinner, Don Giacomo was too much occupied with the enjoyment of his meal to embark on a long story, and Livio was more interested in questioning his friend on all that was passing in their regiment than in Florentine news.

It seemed to Gian that at last the vigour and animation of health were beginning to return to his friend. When he asked him after one comrade and another by name, laughing over little old mess-room jokes, the idle loves of one, the bets of another, it seemed to Gian that his memory must have returned in full force. Then he was suddenly startled by Livio saying: "Some day, Gian, we must get leave, as we missed all our leave this year owing to this wretched illness of mine, and we might carry out our old scheme of a walking tour in the mountains."

Gian looked up at the moment in doubt, and caught a look of warning in Signora Christina's eyes—very slight, only a flash, but enough to pull him up, make him stammer, and have recourse to a glass of wine to hide his perplexity.

"All right," he said; and Livio went on talking of old plans that they had made in the beginning of this ill-fated year.

But the long-dreaded moment came at last; dessert was put on the table. Don Giacopo helped himself to a handful of little leathery white figs, tough as india-rubber, and a glass of madeira, and began his long-winded history of the day he had passed.

When he arrived at the minute and detailed account of Colomba, her beauty and her dress, Gian found it almost impossible to conceal his anxiety; he was white as a sheet, and gnawed his moustache.

But Livio heard the whole story with no emotion whatever beyond a light laugh at his uncle's enthusiasm; even when Don Giacopo pronounced her name with a rolling emphasis, which made poor conscious Gian shudder, and look furtively at his friend—Colomba Bondi—a mouthful of o's and b's—Livio did not wince, showed not the slightest interest in his uncle's story beyond the attention due from courtesy.

Presently Signora Christina rose. Don Giacopo and Livio went to the smoking-room, and Gian followed her into her own favourite salon.

"Gian," she said, turning to him when she had carefully shut the door, "I saw that you were startled by what occurred at dinner."

"I startled?—indeed no!" stammered Gian, the colour rushing into his face.

"And yet it was enough to startle you," went on Signora Christina, seating herself in a low chair, and unfurling her large black fan. "But I will tell you all about it."

Gian could only look at her in blank amazement as she went on:

"I also was greatly startled when I first heard Livio talk as he did to-night, about asking for leave, etc. I consulted Morello about it."

"Ah!"

It was a long-drawn sigh. Gian understood now, it was the lapse in his friend's memory to which Donna Christina was alluding—nothing to do with his fatal secret.

"You need not be anxious," she went on tenderly, "Morello says

that it is not of the slightest consequence. He says it is an understood though rare result of malarial fever when it affects the brain to the extent that it did in my poor boy's case ; a given period of life is a dead blank to him, blotted out of his memory as completely as if it were wiped off a slate."

"And does it last for ever?" said Gian huskily.

Donna Christina put her hand on his. "I see you are alarmed," she said kindly; "but indeed there is no need. Sometimes it lasts all through life, sometimes some trifle seems suddenly to turn the key and memory returns; but this, Morello says, is rare, although he has himself witnessed an instance of it. One thing Morello insists upon very strongly—on no account are we to let Livio become aware of this lapse in his memory—it is a thing of small consequence now, but the fact of his becoming aware that such a thing has happened might give him a dangerous shock."

Gian passed his hand over his brow.

"I can see that," he said thoughtfully. "Did Morello tell you anything about that case to which he alluded, to whom memory was restored?"

"Yes, it was a curious story. The man had a bad illness again, was delirious, and on his recovery was restored to perfection of memory, but Morello assures me that it is rare, and that I must not look to it. Meanwhile, the point at which his memory breaks off is in barracks at Pisa, and the whole episode of his summer leave and journey with you, has been blotted out of his life. After all, it is unimportant; you never told me where you went."

"I sprained my ankle at Spezzia," said Gian indirectly. "That is one of the events gone from Livio's memory, and then you remember we were suddenly recalled to Pisa, Livio fell ill the same day, so suddenly that Morello thought there was sunstroke as well as malaria."

"Yes, and you, his best and kindest friend, brought him home. Never can I forget all that you have been to us."

Gian stifled a sigh as he bent forward, took the long white hand, and raised it to his lips.

Presently Livio and his uncle came in. Livio threw himself down on a low stool and laid his head on his mother's knee.

"Stroke my hair, mother," he said. "Stroke it nicely until I feel as if I must purr like a cat. I want to be made not to think."

"Are you tired, my darling?" said his mother anxiously; while Gian, accustomed like herself to watch for every token of weakness, bent forward to look at him.

"Not tired, only bothered. Go on stroking, mother, and let me ask questions. Did I ever know a Colomba?"

"Yes," said Donna Christina, "Colomba de Pauli, Aimée's school companion."

"Ah, perhaps that accounts for the familiarity of the name. Had she black hair and fine eyes?"

"No, no; you are thinking of her Russian mother, Contesse Nadia. She was splendid."

"There, that is nice! I am beginning to purr now; I wish I were a veritable cat."

Livio was asleep before the words were out of his mouth.

Donna Christina looked up at Gian with a smile, certain to meet an answering tenderness in his gaze at the handsome weary face of the young fellow they both loved so dearly.

"He does not seem to me at all strong yet," said Gian anxiously.

"Ah, but we must have patience. Morello says that it will be some time yet before he is quite recovered."

She went out, stroking the thick dark hair.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN the Borgo San Jacopo Nino was working away might and main, casting hope, sorrow, and the bitter disappointment of his life all into one sacrifice to his art.

"I cannot be happy; I will be great!" he said to himself, and it needed all his strong will to steady the delicate touch of his nervous fingers. The work grew beneath his hands with marvellous beauty. It was the old story of Genius fed and sustained and forced into perfection by bitter human pain.

In the first hours of the fulfilment of his plan, Nino had fancied within himself that to have his divinity dwelling under his roof would be an all-sufficient happiness. Knowing the depth of his own devotion to her, he fancied that in the new variety of life he could make her happy again, could teach her to forget. He himself would never have dared to offer her his home, but she had asked for shelter; surely such devotion, such care as he could lavish on her, would heal her wounds and make her if not happy, at least peaceful.

Little Pippa, taking her cue from Nino, received Colomba as if she had been a queen.

At sight of her gloomy beauty, Pippa resigned her first idea, which was to love and pity her as a dear sister; she shrivelled up into an awe-struck adoration, she waited on her, did not venture to speak unless addressed, and crept as much out of the way as she could. Colomba never noticed her, pushed aside the children, and spoke to no one but Nino, and sat all day with tightly-clenched hands, looking out into the street.

Little Pippa had obeyed Colomba's first request, had gone meekly out and taken the lottery tickets for her which corresponded with the three words she had chosen—Star, Space, Strega—three S's.

When Pippa came home one day, half awe-stricken, half elated, to tell Colomba that she had won the great prize, she did not know what

to expect, whether triumphant joy or at least some pious thanksgiving.

But Colomba received the news with an extraordinary apathy—an apathy so strange that all the evening Nino watched her furtively, half frightened.

Pippa slipped out for an hour's chat with the vendor of pots and pans round the corner; it was such a relief to escape from this tragic state of things into a light atmosphere of frivolous talk, where no one ever discussed anything more important than the price of butter and polenta.

In the morning, Nino was always at work early. Pippa would be down before daybreak with her hair all hanging down her back, to make him hot coffee, after which she went back to her bed again. Nino liked the clear morning light, but it was no reason why other people should do so also.

But on this morning Colomba also had risen early. She had not slept all night, and yet her eyes did not look dim or heavy; on the contrary, they were more shining than usual when she came in and stood by Nino's work.

"Good morning, Cola," he said, looking up into her face with troubled eyes. "Have you slept well?"

"I have been thinking," she answered, drawing a wooden stool forward and seating herself. "We cannot go on like this, Nino."

He threw down his tools with a despairing gesture. "Not go on, Cola? What do you mean? Are you not content?"

"Content!"

She gave a strangely bitter emphasis to the word.

"But what can I do for you?" he asked. "Will not the change of life, of surroundings, help you? My poor, poor child, can I do nothing for you?"

"You cannot help me," said Colomba; "and I have brought on you, and into this once gay cheerful house, the gloom which made my father's home unbearable."

Nino sighed, he could not deny it; but the very fact of Colomba having recognised it herself gave him a momentary feeling of pleasure that some consideration for others had at last penetrated her intense self-absorption.

"It is a joy, a privilege to have you here," he faltered. "Pippa feels it so."

"Pippa? Poor Pippa, she will be glad enough to be freed from that honour and privilege."

"Freed, Cola? What do you mean?"

"This money," she answered—"you must see it—it changes all the aspect of things. I am rich."

"You realise it, and it gives you pleasure?"

Colomba paused a moment before she answered, speaking slowly: "It gives me the means of making myself my husband's equal—

it gives me the chance of meeting him again some day in his own world."

"Poor child!" said Nino sorrowfully. "The world is very wide, and life is cruel."

"And so I am going away, Nino—alone. Hush, hush! I *will* be alone. I bring a gloom and curse on all who love me, and I must escape from them; I will leave them all, let them forget me."

"Where will you go?" said Nino, biting his pale lips.

"Ah, for that I must also depend on you. Have you no friend among all the noble ladies and gentlemen who are always here, who can tell you of some way to educate myself—to make me into a lady like themselves?"

"Yes," said Nino thoughtfully, "I will consult my old friend and patron Don Giacopo Baldaro."

"Lose no time, Nino. I am young, but life is short."

Colomba busied herself in buying clothes, splendid costly garments. The shrewd instincts of the true peasant clung to her, and she bought not real, but imitation diamond rings. They flashed on her brown hands as brilliantly as those she had seen once on Donna Christina's fingers; she thought that no one could detect the difference. Nino saw it at once, he recognised the fact that they flashed too much, that they overdid their part; but he said nothing, all his powers were absorbed in strong effort to endure, not to betray the throbbing of his broken heart. He could not come out of such an atmosphere of large pain to wince over such trifles as Cola's foolish mock diamonds.

Humbly, quietly, he asked for Don Giacopo's help and advice; by Cola's side he told him the full extent and depth of her absolute ignorance.

Don Giacopo accepted the responsibility of adviser with great gusto, strongly recommended the convent in which Aimée de Marcelin was being educated. It was the only educational establishment of which he knew anything, and he himself undertook all the preliminary inquiries and arrangements.

When the answer came to his letter from the superior of St. Marie d'Anjou, he found himself obliged to constitute Colomba his own especial *protégée*, for she was not eligible without some such introduction. He was highly delighted with the importance and amusement of the *rôle* he was playing, and he felt that it gave him a fair excuse to demand a personal interview with Nino's beautiful ward.

Nino, in fear and trembling, asked Colomba if she objected; but she was quite ready, and she received the old gentleman with a strange kind of sullen dignity which impressed him with the same awe that was felt by all who came across her.

She said very little, and his usual loquacity completely deserted him, so that he was glad to turn to Nino to draw him into the very difficult uphill conversation.

Presently Colomba said very quietly : " One thing I must ask you to mention, *Eccellenza*, if you write to the reverend mother."

" Yes?" he said with a mixture of kindliness and admiration in his tone.

" Tell her that I am married."

" Married!—impossible!" and he looked at Nino in utter amazement.

" Yes," she went on very calmly. " Nino has told you part of my history; I am a contadina. In our village we marry young. Heaven is not always kind; I have lost my husband."

There was not a sound of hesitation or faltering in her speech.

" It is true," said Nino, answering Don Giacomo's questioning look. " It is quite true, the poor child, and it is since then, within the last weeks, that she has won the great prize and has become rich."

" You will vouch for all this, Nino? I may accept this story entirely on your responsibility."

Colomba rose to her feet. " I will leave you to talk of it," she said. " If you can help me, I thank you; if not, doubtless there are other means."

And she drew her heavy velvet gown round her, and left the room.

" She is magnificent! superb!" exclaimed Don Giacomo. " And she has lost her husband—what was he?"

" He was a soldier—he did not treat her well—let us not talk of him."

" Ah, so that accounts for the tragedy in her face. I will write at once, and you may be assured, my friend, that she shall be received, and that for my sake her education shall have every attention. And now, my casket——"

Nino smiled. He went to a corner of his *atelier* and drew a large blue-striped cloth from off some object standing there.

" Finished? impossible! You do not say so! Ah, rascal, you have been making a fool of me. You never told me that the other panels were done. *Per Bacco!* never, no never in all my life have I seen such work! It must be seen, exhibited! It should make your fortune. You villain, you wanted to surprise me."

And the enchanted dilettante positively seized the artist round the neck and embraced him. It was a *chef d'œuvre*, and Nino knew it well, and on his pale cheek came a flush of joy and triumph in his great success. He could not fail to recognise the genius that had been nurtured on such bitter pain.

CHAPTER XIX.

" AND you will send nothing to Maiano—to your parents, to Maddalena?"

" Why should I? they have enough. To have enough is to be rich."

"Ah well, perhaps you are right, but the long dull life of ceaseless toil can be brightened sometimes, can be made sweeter by a little ease."

"They were hard and harsh to me; my father struck me."

"Cola," said Nino sorrowfully, "your great sorrow should have softened you and taught you sympathy."

"They did not sympathise with me."

"Nor you with them. You exacted all, you gave nothing."

"You weary me," said Colomba; "leave me alone, why cannot you all let me go my own way and be as miserable as I like? Why cannot I lead my own life?"

"Because God has not willed it so," said Nino solemnly. "You are responsible for the influence you have on the lives of those around you."

"Then I will go away—away to the dark yellow rushing river, and find there rest and an end to this ugly, hateful life."

Nino said nothing, but as he bent over his work his pale lips moved. He was asking that some discipline, some strong power, should mould this wild rebellious nature.

She rose restlessly and went to the window.

"There is nothing to see this side," she said, "nothing but river and sky and the far-off green of the cascade trees. I am going into Pippa's room to watch the street. One can never tell; in a busy town, some day——"

She did not finish her sentence, but with one of her habitual long moaning sighs she left the room.

Nino looked after her wistfully, but he did not follow her. He could not spend his life wandering after her restless steps from room to room; his heart and life and hand alike were disciplined; a noble scroll of acanthus leaves was growing under his master-touch.

Pippa was standing at the open window, her arms a-kimbo, shouting to some neighbour in the street.

"Twenty centissimi! bah, don't tell me. My cousin sold two of them for ten each and one was cracked, only she put the paper price on the crack, and who will be the wiser until it bursts in the fire. Twenty indeed!"

"Well, nobody asks you to have them," shouted a shrill voice in the street. "He who won't pay can't expect to have my goods. *Avanti!*"

This with a loud whoop as the vendor of pots in the street urged on his mule with his cargo of wares.

Pippo stood watching till they were out of sight. "He will be back soon," she said to herself with a laugh. An old woman over the way lifted up her voice and shouted:

"Well done, la Pippa. If his exactions are allowed to go on, we shall have to give twenty for goods worth ten. He is a churl—a miserable, grasping churl. O la! when one thinks what a heart of gold his mother was."

"Who was his mother?" said Pippa, always alive to a piece of gossip.

"His mother? She washed clothes in the Mugnone. Yes, yes, a good washer, and a responsible, good woman, but obstinate. No mule was ever so obstinate. The river rose one night—do you remember that rising? Bah, it was before you were born! The river flooded all over the lower parts of the town. Janina was in her bed and the river came in. She took no notice. Some folks say she had a fit from the fright, but those who knew her best declare it was from sheer obstinacy; she always said what hadn't been before wouldn't happen now, and she would not give up her opinion, and go upstairs like her neighbours. Bah, it was bad to be drowned in that dirty muddy water, and for one who had spent all her life in washing—*via!*"

"And to think that one so faithful to the past should have a son whose one thought is to raise his prices! I have given ten centessimi and I am not going to give more. Maria Santissima!" Her voice quavered into consternation, for Colomba had come into the room and laid her hand on her shoulder. Pippa's bright manner vanished into a look of awe.

"The signora will sit in the window?" she said. "See, I will arrange the cushions that Nino bought yesterday. So, now the chair is not so bad. Can I do anything more?"

"Nothing," answered Colomba, indifferently.

She threw herself back among the great yellow damask cushions that Nino had bought for her the day before, with a feeling that this colour would harmonise with her colouring.

"I want nothing," she repeated, and she leant her elbow on the window-sill looking out.

Pippa turned, and, walking almost on tiptoe, left the room.

The coming of this wonderful stranger had not added to the happiness of Pippa's life. It brought a restraint upon her of which she had never had any experience; the thing that worried the poor faithful little woman beyond anything was that, do what she might to conceal it, she could not like this new inmate of their home. It made her miserable to see the absolute indifference with which the proud self-absorbed girl received all the tender care and consideration of Nino. Nino's one thought seemed to be what he could devise to make her happy and content, and, on her part, she received all this homage as due to her—in fact, she was too much self-absorbed to recognise it. This Pippa could not understand. She thought that no woman with any heart at all could fail to note how changed Nino was. The bright, spirited manner of his work had degenerated into quiet plodding. His lips were always compressed, and the fine delicate face had grown very pale, while a certain weariness of movement and gesture betrayed the deformity as it had never been betrayed before.

Pippa, who loved him, who actually worshipped him as the

guardian-angel of her husband and children, read it all with woman's heart and eye. She saw that the light of hope had been quenched in his life. She saw that the glamour of love was dying out of his imagination: that the destruction of the ideal which had been his glory and inspiration had caused him even more suffering than the disappointment of his hope.

Pippa's little loving heart knew more even than this. She knew that he had tried to infuse a new kind of life into his work. She knew of a hidden work which as yet no other eyes had beheld. Nino had carved for his old patron, and his work was a masterpiece, but it did not satisfy the craving sorrow of his life.

Nino accepted Pippa's knowledge of his secret work, trusting her so completely that he never dreamed of asking her to respect his secret. He only smiled and patted her hand kindly when he recognised the awe-stricken manner which conveyed to him the highest appreciation of his success. For the new work was a crucifix, so beautiful that little Pippa never looked on it without the lowering of voice and rapid sign of the cross, which testified to the marvellously devotional character he had been able to throw into it.

In this holy work, and with strong prayer, Nino had found the peace which had settled down on his pale face and large soft eyes—a peace which had calmed and tamed the erratic pulses of his thin, nervous hand. Day after day, when the fading light warned him that he must spare eyes and labour, he was to be seen kneeling in the soft grey shadows of the fair church of Santo Spirito, kneeling in absolute stillness, his face bowed, absorbed in prayer.

There in the dying light, where nothing broke the gloom of the grey stone pillars (colouring which gives a peculiarly shadowy, spiritual atmosphere to that lovely church), Nino offered up all the strong pain of his life, his great sorrows, his sad infirmity, his passionate broken heart.

There he learnt the great lesson of the storms of life, and there only he found peace.

Pippa saw it, recognised it, and stood by, with a feeling that she was watching the fashioning of a saint out of common clay.

Pippa was busy in her kitchen, Nino with large tools sketching out with bold touches a new group of leaves, when suddenly all were startled by the sound of a strange harsh cry. It was not loud, but the sound penetrated to the *atelier* and to the kitchen, and throwing all aside, Nino and Pippa, even the half-blind Scappi and the frightened child, rushed to the spot.

Colomba was standing by the open window; as they entered she sprang forward.

"Do not stop me—stand back!" she cried. Nino caught hold of her, but she tore herself away. "It is Gian!—Gian! I see him; let me go!" she cried; and before they could prevent her, she had dashed downstairs and was in the street.

Nino turned a look of despair on Pippa. "Is it her husband?" she cried, trying hard to suppress her tears, for she had been terrified.

"No; his friend. I must follow her. Heaven pity us!" said poor Nino, rapidly going into the street.

There was no sign of Colomba; only wondering curious neighbours were all staring out of their windows and doors, and pointing down the street towards the Ponte Vecchio, the old bridge covered with its quaint jewellers' shops, and in that direction Nino followed.

He pursued her as fast as he could go, but his weak frame could not overtake her rapid movements. As he ran, the very terror of some indignity, some *exposé* disgraceful to Colomba, weighed on him like lead. It was shameful, disgraceful to his refined nature, this flight of hers through the broad open street in the eyes of the whole town; his pale cheek burned, he panted hard, he longed, yet dreaded indescribably to come within sight of her.

It had happened thus to Colomba. Seated at the window watching, as always, every figure that passed down the street, she had suddenly recognised the tall slight figure and soldier-like gait of the man she had always known as Gian. Perceiving that her cry to attract his attention failed to do so, she followed him with a wild determination to force him into an explanation. He was not alone, another man was with him, but she heeded nothing.

Rushing into the street, regardless of all but her own mad wish, Colomba flew after the fast disappearing figures. The two officers were walking quickly, they were in a hurry, and they were half way across the bridge before she came up with them.

About the centre of the quaint old bridge, wide arches overhead frame in a beautiful view of the broad river with its picturesque embankments, and far-off distant view.

Under one of these arches Gian had paused for one moment. He was about to relight a cigar which in the eagerness of conversation had gone out. With a rush as of a whirlwind, Colomba came upon him, followed by a little eager, noisy crowd.

Colomba laid her hand upon his shoulder, she was panting hard. At the sight of her flushed face, her burning eyes, the clenched teeth through which each deep-drawn breath seemed to hiss, Gian started back in a kind of terror.

"Marco!" he exclaimed.

His companion looked on the strange scene with intense surprise and keen annoyance, for the spectators were increasing on the bridge.

"Gian, Gian!" cried Colomba, recovering her voice, "tell me, what have you done with my husband?"

Gian did not answer; he had grown white, almost livid. The girl's hand was clutching his shoulder fiercely. Marco, his friend, stroked his moustache and exclaimed, "*Per Bacco!*"

The scene became more exciting every moment. "Where is my husband? I will know the truth—tell me!" cried Colomba.

At this moment the crowd was pushed aside, thrust away by the strong impulse of the rescuer, and Nino advanced.

"Cola," he cried in a voice which strove to be calm—"Cola, listen to me; you must come away."

But Cola only repeated her words louder still. "Gian, false coward! tell me the truth: what have you done with my husband?"

Murmurs began to rise through the crowd.

"Why can't you speak to her?" cried one; and another said roughly, "Have you no tongue?"

The officer whom Gian had called Marco interfered. "Captain Montana," he said, "probably this is some fatal mistake. Do you know this woman or her husband?"

Then came on Gian the most fearful temptation of his life. In one short second of time all the consequences that must inevitably follow an acknowledgment that he knew her, rushed into his mind. Then all concealment must be at an end. Livio must know, he would never forgive. The cold drops of anguish stood on Gian's brow; what should he do or say?

"I think," said Marco, in a low voice very coldly, "that if you can satisfy the people that this is a mistake, it will be better."

"My husband, where is he?" cried Colomba. The colour was coming and going fearfully in her face.

Then the evil conquered the good, and Gian sullied his honour with a lie. "How should I know?" he said.

"Then you do not know this woman?" said Marco anxiously.

"No; I do not know her."

Then Colomba's hand fell from his shoulder, a sudden terrible consciousness came over her, of strange eyes, curious glances all round, witnessing her disgrace. It was all clear to her now. This man had denied her; then Livio also was false—a liar and a traitor.

In her mute despair the woman's beauty was so magnificent that the crowd stood looking at her with a sort of reverence.

To Nino the shame of it all was unendurable; but he did not shrink, he took her hand gently. "See, my child," he said, throwing at once the protection of a kind of paternal care over her, "it is all a mistake—these gentlemen will pardon us—come home with me."

There was a kind of sympathetic murmur through the crowd.

"Come with me, my child," Nino repeated, as he drew her arm through his.

All this time she had stood, a strange rigid statue of despair; now she suddenly covered her face with one hand, and allowed Nino to hold the other and lead her away.

Marco took the arm of his friend. "*Diamine!*" he exclaimed, "what a magnificent woman! but mad, is she not?"

"Yes, Heaven help her—mad," said Gian, shuddering violently.

(To be continued.)

LOVE'S SEASONS.

"SWEETHEART, will you marry me?
 Springtime comes rejoicingly,
 Scented winds are blowing soft
 Down the mead and up the croft;
 Primroses and violets pied
 Glimmer in the greenwood shade—
 When could time more fitting be,
 Sweetheart, will you marry me?"

"Nay, nay, leave me yet alone,
 Love is young, and not full grown."

"Surely now 'tis time to wed,
 All the hawthorn blooms are shed,
 And the great horse-chestnut trees
 Rain thin petals down the breeze;
 Fair the day and blue the skies,
 Glad the air with butterflies,
 Roses sweet are blushing red—
 Surely it is time to wed!"

"Nay, nay, leave me yet alone,
 Love's red rose is not full blown."

"If we linger love may die,
 Fleet the golden hours fly;
 Think not time will ling'ring stand,
 Autumn's voice is in the land,
 Russet-gold for green and grey,
 Redder sun and short'ning day,
 Till that winter draweth nigh—
 If we linger love may die!"

"Nay, nay, leave me yet alone,
 Love's rich harvest scarce is scwn."

"Oh, the days are dark and drear!
 Death pursues the waning year,
 Soft and chill the snows lie white,
 Ghostly wild winds call at night:
 Leafless trees stretch gaunt and bare,
 Dearth and sadness everywhere.
 Vain 'twere now to woo you, dear—
 Oh, the days are dark and drear!"

"Nay, 'tis now Love's might is shown,
 Unto perfect stature grown.

"Circling seasons come and go,
 Love's alone no changes know;
 Sunshine pales, and storms arise,
 Love alone has cloudless skies;
 Swift years vanish as we gaze,
 Love alone has length of days.
 Lo! our life, a fleeting breath,
 Love outlasteth Time and Death."

CHRISTIAN BURKE.

Q

MISS ANNE.

A SKETCH.

I.

THERE was not a cloud in the scorching blue sky, not a breath of wind stirring the silent sea, or rustling the summer foliage of the trees and shrubs in the garden ; the tall, slim eucalyptus reared its weeping head towards the sun, and dreamt of a southern land and sky ; and in its chequered shade, gazing up through its long tapering leaves at the hot and blazing heaven, sat a little old maid, dreaming, too, of the warmth and sunshine and joy of the dead land of the past.

Not that Miss Anne was really old—not more than thirty-eight at the most—nor were romance and love dead to her, for it was upon such dainty fare that she had fed and nourished her soul, and allowed it to intoxicate itself through the long and lonely winter months of her solitude.

But the insignia of old maid were indelibly impressed upon her. There was something faded and patient about her whole appearance, as of one who had *waited*, not *lived*, through those ten best years of a woman's life ; something precise in the very way she sat, so straight and motionless, with her small narrow figure, and head rather drooping, that made one feel that hers was a little life of conventionalities, and that her daily habits were also precise and well-regulated, as only those of one leading a perfectly solitary and self-centred existence can be.

Poor little Miss Anne ! She must have been so pretty, once upon a time, with blush-rose cheeks and dimples, and soft confiding eyes. But when a woman waits and waits and waits through ten long years, blush-rose cheeks lose their dewy freshness, and dimpled cheeks their roundness, and bright eyes must grow a little tired and dimmed. For you cannot nourish the heart on such meagre fare as dreams of romance and love ; *life*, only, can quicken the blood and keep roses and roundness and brightness in cheeks and eyes.

Ten years—exactly ten years ! Her waiting was just as old as the eucalyptus tree. Her longing and hope had grown and flourished with its growth, kept a certain greenness and youth throughout the dreariness of those ten years, just as the tree sprang fair and graceful amidst its bleak surroundings, under a cold northern sky. She remembered how, when they planted it there—he and she together stopping very often in their work to look and smile and blush at each other—he had quoted Heine's little song about the lonely fir-tree dreaming, on its snowy height, of a southern palm far away in the

land of the morning, and how she had told herself that henceforth she should be like that bleak fir-tree, dreaming of *him* in the flowery tropical world where they had first met and learnt to love each other.

But he would come back to her. "As fast as the eucalyptus grows," he had said, when they planted the little shoot that so soon grew into a tall, shapely tree, "so fast you may know that my love is growing. Like it, my love will become stronger and higher, and more worthy of you, every hour that we are parted."

These then were the two romances over which Miss Anne used to dream under the eucalyptus tree in the garden, when to all appearance there was only a dried-up little old maid sedately knitting stockings or crocheting shawls for a Working Guild. Two romances: one the romance of the past; the other the romance of the future, whose *motif* was summed up in the words, "John is coming back again."

The romance of the past was nothing unusually interesting—a boy and girl attachment, where the boy was a penniless younger son, and the girl thwarted by a matter-of-fact parent, who held practical objections to improvident marriages—the commonest thing in the world, and one that does not leave very deep scars behind. The only unusual thing in this case was that the boy and girl not only vowed to wait for each other, but actually *did* wait through ten slow-creeping years.

ANNE O'Brien was the only child of a widower of crusty temper and roving habits. She was born and bred in Tasmania, where her father had some Government appointment, and the first twenty-five years of her life were spent there, or amongst the neighbouring islands. It was during an expedition to the South Sea Islands that she and John Mordaunt found out the great secret—so new and so wonderful to each boy and girl, in turn, who finds it, though in itself as old as the hills, and with just as little variety in its composition.

John was one of their party, and as he and Anne (Nan they called her in those days) were the only youthful members amongst three or four middle-aged friends of Captain O'Brien, the result was only what might have been predicted.

In that glorious climate, amongst exquisite scenery glowing with tropical luxuriance and warmth, love seemed to be born at the very first glance of eloquent eyes, the first sympathetic words between two young creatures who were both revelling in the joy and freshness of life, as it appears to us when we are twenty. To row in and out of the rich brown reefs, over a sea as blue and shining as the eyes of the girl in the stern of the boat, along shores heavy with rich vegetation, where birds of gorgeous plumage flitted amongst the beautiful foliage, was to John Mordaunt a foretaste of heaven. And Nan, unconscious at first, put down the fulness of her happiness to the beauty around her—the radiant sunshine and fairyland loveliness of those flowery isles amidst their gleaming blue waters.

How much of it was due to these calm, golden effects of Nature?

How much to John's chivalrous manliness, and Nan's girlish sweetness and charm? Be that as it may, before many weeks were over, they found that a very strong spell had been flung over them, drawing them together with a force that nothing but death (they were *sure*) could lessen. The test soon came. Captain O'Brien's health broke down, and his thoughts turned towards home with a curious persistency, considering that for more than twenty years he had delighted in colonial life. So he and Nan said "Good-bye" to all their old friends, all the sunshine and beauty the girl loved, and journeyed forth to the old home under the bleak grey sky of the north. John Mordaunt accompanied them on the long voyage, and came to see the last of them in the old country before he went back to New South Wales, where he meant to acquire a fortune for Miss Anne's sake. He was so clever that she felt confident it would be a matter of only a very few years, and together they used to build castles in the air of most magnificent structure—though, as far as that went, Miss Anne was quite ready to follow him into the meanest cottage; it was only John who thought her feet too beautiful and tender to tread on anything less precious than woven gold.

The day before he left her they planted the little eucalyptus tree in a sheltered corner of the garden. For, though the skies were bleak and the country dreary on this south-western coast of Ireland, there were sudden surprises here and there of plants and shrubs that seemed to have fallen by mistake from some hotter clime; and John declared her eucalyptus would flourish like the bay-tree.

It was here, too, that they had parted. Captain O'Brien had set his face against any engagement; but John and Nan cared very little what any one else thought concerning their future. They were certain of each other, come weal or woe. Only for a moment John felt a pang of jealous fear.

"Oh, some one will steal you from me, Nan," he cried. "Promise me you will not change."

Nan laughed with scorn at the idea.

"Steal *me* from *you*? Never! Besides, no one will try."

"Yes, they will," said John despondently; "every one will try. You don't know how lovely you are, Nan. Yes, it's no use your blushing. You are like a lovely pink flower when you blush, and that makes you prettier than ever, so that any man who saw you would fall in love with you. But you must come here every day, and see how our tree is getting on, and that will remind you of me."

"Yes, we will confide in each other. I, longing for you, and the eucalyptus longing for its native land, both here in this horrid country where it rains all the year round," sighed Nan.

"Oh, you must be plucky, Nan. Look, what jolly wild hills and sea and rocks! It's not up to *our* world, but still it is rather fine, too, in its way; and you, the eucalyptus, must struggle bravely whenever the sun shines, and try not to notice the rain. Only be brave, my

dear little Nan, and all will come right," said John, putting his strong arms round her, and looking down into her sad face with his kind steadfast eyes. "And always remember this : as fast as the eucalyptus grows, so fast my love will grow. Like it, my love will become stronger and higher, and more worthy of you, every hour that we are parted."

* * * * *

But, alas ! these pretty pink and white blossoms are the first to fall, and with the fading of the pinkness and whiteness, it is astonishing how quickly the prettiness seems to vanish too. Miss Anne could no longer be likened to a pink flower, unless it were to one dried and pressed between the pages of a book, its scent and colour long since fled. Five years' constant attendance on a querulous invalid is enough to take the glow off any woman ; and after her father's death, Miss Anne had neither money nor energy with which to face the outer world. So she remained in that bleak Irish home, where the long winters were so wet and grey, and where, to her sun-loving nature, the wild rugged scenery was utterly dreary and unsympathetic. True, she possessed a tiny fairyland in her garden, and had her golden dreams under the eucalyptus that had sprung up so gallantly, but for the rest she was, at heart, a little old maid wedded to routine.

The doctor's wife, the clergyman's maiden sisters, and a few more narrow-lived and narrow-thoughted dwellers in the village two miles off, were all that she had to depend upon for society. Every one knew that she had a romance of some sort ; and at first, romances being rare in Ballakilloge, this won her much deference. But as year after year passed by, and still Miss Anne's mysterious expectations bore no fruit, the other spinsters of the neighbourhood began to turn up their noses, and her little sentimentalities and growing old maidishness became a subject for ridicule.

The arrival of those wonderful foreign letters was quite a public event. They came about once in six months, and for at least a fortnight before they were due, Miss Anne, with her modest figure and patient face, was daily seen stealing, half guiltily, down the street towards the post-office.

"It must be going on for post time," the Misses O'Kelly would say with a contemptuous sniff. "There goes poor Miss Anne."

Letters cherished like sacred relics, and full of interest and vigour and steady affection—full of John, in short ; not the one from whom she had parted, but John grown stronger, wiser, and more experienced. Just what he used to be, only with his good qualities more fully developed, his youthful charm merged into the sterling worth of manhood.

Then, at last, there came a day when there was no foreign letter awaiting her at the post-office, though the mails were due, and he had never missed writing before. There was disappointment in Miss Anne's heart as she pattered up the stony street in her goloshes, but

of doubt—not an atom. The unclouded faith of ten years was not to be shattered in a day simply because of the non-arrival of a letter dependent upon winds and tides and steam. He might be ill—and here she hurried on nervously as if she would outstep unspoken fears—or he might have been delayed by sea, and so have missed the mail, or——

“Miss Anne! Miss Anne!” called a voice, “sure it’s no forren letter for you at all this day, but jist a telegraph from Cork that got astray in the parson’s bag enthirely.”

It was Matt Flynn, the postman, hurrying after her, and waving an unfamiliar-looking envelope over his head. He knew, like every one else, the mysterious importance of Miss Anne’s letters.

“For me? From Cork?” she said, indifferently, as she tore open the yellow envelope and glanced at the message.

Then her heart gave a great bound. For a moment, the little white houses on either side of the street seemed to reel and fall, a great white mist in front of her; whilst something, that was half delirious joy, half acute physical pain, turned her face as white as a sheet.

Only for a moment. Then outwardly as calm and collected as she considered it due to her womanly dignity always to appear before the opposite sex, she quietly read for the second time those badly-written, pencilled, wonderful words:

“I shall be with you to-morrow about half-past four. John Mordaunt, Cork.”

II.

“No bad news, I hope? Nothing to distress you?” asked the eldest Miss O’Kelly, fixing her inquisitive eyes on Miss Anne’s face. “Telegrams are such startling things, you know. We felt that we must come and make sure that you were not in trouble.”

“No—no, thank you; it was nothing of that sort. Quite the contrary,” stammered Miss Anne, with ill-suppressed cheerfulness. “That is to say, it was no bad news.”

“Ah—then we may be relieved of our fears, dear Miss Anne. We were so afraid, knowing that you had not received your usual letter, that perhaps some friend was ill, or something of that sort. But, indeed, what business is it of ours.”

The sisters O’Kelly had tracked her to where she was sitting under the eucalyptus tree. Nothing but curiosity could have induced them to toil so far under a scorching sun, along a shadeless road under the hills; but curiosity is an infallible spur to even the most faded of spinsters. That something unusual was about to occur was evident from Miss Anne’s flutters of suppressed excitement and the smiles that kept beaming over the faded thin cheeks. On the other hand,

she looked pale and exhausted, as if the unexpected joy, whatever it was, had literally been too much for her. Miss O'Kelly pointedly remarked on this, and felt sure her friend ought not to be out so much in the sun.

"I like the sun; it is so seldom we have too much of it here," answered Miss Anne; "and I assure you my health is as good as ever it was."

"Perhaps it was that telegram," put in Miss Grace; "and not getting your letter and all. It must have given you quite a turn."

"No, no," murmured Miss Anne. A ghost of a blush mantled her cheeks. She felt so full of importance, so overwhelmed by her joy, that she longed to confide even in Miss O'Kelly. Engaged to John Mordaunt, who was coming home to-morrow to take her away with him! No wonder she was self-conscious and elated.

Then the conversation turned to the Working Guild in Aid of Distressed Irish Ladies, in a languishing way certainly, since all along the Misses O'Kelly were working up to the great secret, whilst Miss Anne's wandering thoughts were with the morrow.

"You would be a great loss to us," said Miss Grace, at last becoming desperate, "if ever you were to leave the Guild. But I suppose we may count on you as a member next year again."

The bait took. Miss Anne looked up with her tell-tale blush and tremors. An expansion of confidence and longing for sympathy came over her again.

"I—I cannot tell," she said; "next year matters may be so different, one can never be sure what may happen."

"You are not thinking of leaving us?" cried the sisters, with a crescendo of interrogation.

"No—oh, no! At least that is to say—oh, indeed, I meant nothing," Miss Anne expostulated feebly; "but next year is a long way to look forward to, Miss O'Kelly."

"Why, Miss Anne, one might think you were going to be married," cried Miss Grace, with a loud laugh to cover the pointedness of her remark; "one might indeed."

Miss Anne dropped her crochet and, clasping her hands nervously together, lowered her bashful eyes. Her secret seemed to be burning her tongue.

"Well—well—yes, Miss O'Kelly; yes, Miss Grace. Perhaps it may be so—perhaps so. Strange things happen, do they not? And you would not expect it of me—I have never given you any cause to think such a thing could happen to me. But yes, Miss Grace, you have guessed right. I think—that is, I know—I am sure that I am going to be—to be——"

"No! I could not have believed it. I never did expect it of you," ejaculated Miss O'Kelly, rising, and opening her parasol with a jerk. "But I am sure we wish you joy; though indeed it does seem strange at first—considering that you have never told us a word of it—and

your age too. But that is neither here nor there, and we are the last people to remind you of it. Well! All I can say is that you have borne your waiting nobly, Miss Anne—nobly. And may the gentleman have been as faithful on his part is the sincerest wish I can offer you."

Miss Anne watched the retreating figures with no feeling of soreness or disappointment. They were unsympathetic and suspicious; but then, poor things, they knew nothing about man's love, and how constant it can be. At all events they had never known John, so whatever might be their knowledge of love, it could not be so perfect and complete as her own.

How she hoped it would be a day like this when he arrived! How beautiful the world was in this bright sunshine! It was surprising to her now that she had been so blind to the peaceful grandeur of the hills, and the shining loveliness of the sea that encircled their feet. And how delicately the eucalyptus leaves traced themselves against the blue. *Their* tree, whose rapid growth had been such a solace to her superstitious soul, as an emblem of John's love and faith. It had shot up tall and strong during those ten years; rather an incongruity, at first sight, in that wild country, before one had found out the rare beauties that spring up in the moist soil of the Emerald Isle.

Where should she meet him? Here, where they had parted? Or quietly in the sitting-room, where no one would see if he——

Miss Anne shivered, and felt a little shocked at her own thoughts.

Should she run to meet him or wait until he came? Should she cry out with glad delight, or be silent until he had spoken? What should she wear? What would they say to each other? What would it all be like, this great, wonderful, long long dreamed of meeting?

She had gone over these questions a hundred times before; and what generally won the day was the meeting under the eucalyptus tree, she in the white gown in which he had last seen her, and in which he had told her she looked like a lovely pink flower. Not many words would be spoken; only "Nan" and "John," and then that unmentionable token that Miss Anne blushed to think of. After that, life presented a golden blank to her; imagination could go no further.

How often Miss Anne set and re-set, tapped and re-tapped the barometer in the porch that evening, it is impossible to say. Biddy, her buxom parlour-maid, felt even her stolid brain penetrated by a sense of coming revolution, and, with a shrewd guess at the nature of it, could not help staring fixedly at her mistress to see what effect it had upon her. Miss Anne blushed and fidgeted, and tried not to smile consciously. She had always heard that the world looked upon women with different respect the moment they were engaged. Certainly it seemed to her that interested, inquisitive eyes pursued her to-day, and that the very air was charged with her secret.

"The glass is going down, Biddy. I am afraid there will be a

break in the weather," she remarked, tentatively, as she took her bedroom candle and said Good-night to the girl. "But the glass is sometimes wrong, is it not, Biddy?"

"To be sure it is, miss."

"I think it will be fine to-morrow; indeed I am sure it will be. I am very anxious that it should be fine to-morrow, Biddy, because—I am expecting a friend to see me."

"To be sure you are, miss," repeated Biddy, turning her back precipitately, and as Miss Anne paused once more to tap the weather-glass, she thought she heard a smothered giggle echoing down the back-stairs.

In the little tragedies and joys of our own lives we very seldom see how closely they are interwoven with the ridiculous, though it may be evident enough to our friends; and to Miss Anne her secret was nothing if not sublime.

* * * *

Nothing may be perfect. Miss Anne's summer weather might just as well have lasted twenty-four hours longer, instead of turning first to a thin drizzle, then to gusts of wind and heavy rain that blurred garden and sea and hills into a dull white mist.

She could not meet him under the eucalyptus tree. But she would have a fire lit in the sitting-room, and he could stretch himself comfortably in the big arm-chair as he used to do. Even in those days some little old-maidish instinct had always prompted her to tidy and tuck back the loose chintzes which he left in such disorder. She had filled the room with flowers the day before, and this morning she usurped her cook's place and made a pile of those cakes John used to like so much. After that she sat down with her crochet, in front of the clock, thinking over the past, and over the time that was coming; and finally, with a sudden feeling of half-fright, half-shyness, stole up to her room to put on that long laid-by gown of fresh white muslin.

How strange it seemed to exchange the familiar grey stuff, for anything so youthful and bridelike. She felt almost like a widow leaving off her weeds for the first time. It was so loose too! She had no idea she had been so plump as a girl; but there was nothing to regret in that; John had always said he disliked fat women; and besides she would soon get back her old health and colour now that she was going to be happy and cared for. Should she wear a rose at her throat? There would just be time to run downstairs and get one.

In the passage she met Biddy, and this time the girl's laughter could by no means be suppressed. For a moment she stared in amazement at the strange little figure decked in bridal white, the thin face looking more than ever prematurely old, in spite of the joy radiating from her eyes; then fled downstairs.

Miss Anne ran back to her room. The slight exertion took away

her breath, and her head reeled. It was excitement, she said to herself; joy had come with too sudden a shock, and she was nervous now that the time was so near. It was four o'clock; time to be waiting quietly in the sitting-room. For a moment she hesitated. Then, scarcely knowing why, but perhaps with some dim sense of the fitness of things, she tore off the white gown, hastily slipped into the quaker-like old homespun, and in a few minutes was sitting working before the fire—a quiet, prim, reserved woman of thirty-eight.

She was only just in time. A car was dashing up the gravel drive. She heard the ring of the bell, the banging of the door, the bustle of arrival, coat, hat, and stick, flung on to the hall table, a kind of general sensation that some one was in the house whom it was not large enough to hold, and then . . .

III.

AGAIN that feeling of faintness, of joy literally taking away her breath. Unconsciously she still went on hurriedly working; she dared not raise her head or speak. Yet she was not afraid; had not one vestige of doubt of any kind; knew that love was actually with her, here in that little room.

"Nan! I have come back. Won't you speak to me, and look at me?"

It was John's voice, full and deep, with a ring of solemn joy in it that sounded to her like music.

"Wait," she whispered. "It is too much just at first. Let me listen—and know."

"It is ten years, Nan," he went on. "How much time we have to make up for. Have you no welcome for me?"

"Oh, wait," she repeated. "It has been so sudden. Let me get used to it. It is enough, at first, to know that you are here, here in this very room. I dare not speak to you, I dare not look at you yet. Wait a few moments, John."

There was silence. And during those "few moments," John Mordaunt underwent one of those bitter tragedies that only to outsiders wear the grotesque stamp of the ridiculous. He, too, had had his illusions in those ten years—one that he had borne about with him by land and sea in a tiny morocco case—the miniature of a girl with round pink cheeks and shining eyes, in the very prime of beauty and freshness.

What he now saw was a little faded woman with straight, neatly-brushed hair, whose sunken eyes told of ill-health and perpetual dulness of life; freshness and brightness gone, without expression gained; girlhood dead; in its stead, a washed-out womanhood, with

none of the depth and completeness that intellect and experience give, in the place of youth, to stronger natures.

Nan was dead. He did not know this woman. How could he speak to her as he would have spoken to Nan? Where was the sympathy and mutual knowledge that used to exist between them? His heart sank like lead as he thought of what the future held for him in marriage with this ghost of his early love. What follies were the fancies of boys and girls!

So when Miss Anne had sufficiently recovered from her maidenly embarrassment to raise her eyes to John's face, what she saw written in it was not love and tenderness, but consternation, regret, and pitiful wonder; his first expression of affection gradually drying up into the ceremonious politeness due to any woman or stranger.

"You are greatly changed," he said, in a grave, distant way; "I should hardly have known you again."

"I should have known you anywhere," she faltered; then drew herself up stiffly. "Ten years is a long time; it leaves room for many changes."

"Yes, yes. It was very hard upon you," he said kindly. "It was wrong to bind you to me all those years; I ought never to have asked it. And few women would have gone through with it."

She did not answer, but took up her work again. Everything seemed to have come to a full-stop. She scarcely realised what had happened, but was vaguely conscious that she would have given all she possessed to live those years over again. They had been redeemed by hope; now there was nothing but blank desolation and death in her heart. For the sympathy that had been killed in John's breast, was, in hers, still alive and throbbing, and had helped her to read his unspoken thought in one lightning flash; his disappointment, his sudden knowledge that he had outgrown her, and lived *past* her.

He made an effort to speak naturally, and put her at her ease, if possible to hide from her his discovery. Already the grim humour of the situation was beginning to strike his senses, mingled with its pitiful sadness.

"I saw the eucalyptus as I drove in," he said; "what a success it has been. I always told you it would be. Now it is quite a respectable tree. Do you remember planting it?"

"I never forget anything," answered Miss Anne drily. "I have a very long memory, and there is nothing here to make me forget. We are quiet people at Ballakilloge."

"Tell me everything that has happened. How have you passed your life?" said John. "There must be more than the bare outline you gave me in your letters."

"I told you everything—everything. There is nothing for you to hear. I would far rather know what *you* have done. You have lived your life, I have only waited."

"I know, I know! 'Men must work, and women must weep.' That must always be so, and the advantage is all on our side," he said pityingly. "Five years ago I hoped our probation was over; but things went wrong, and I had to begin all over again. I have much to tell you, Nan."

She signed to him to go on, and, glad of anything to break the threatening silence, he told her the story of those ten years, conscious, all the time that every word he spoke widened the gulf between them. His eyes took in every detail of the neat little room, even to the three books on the round table; a *Leisure Hour*, a well-used *Hints on Knitting*, and a smartly-bound Wordsworth, evidently more for ornament than use. Intellect, too, had run to seed; there was not a single point at which their minds could unite in intelligent sympathy; there could never be anything more than tender pity on one side, blind admiration on the other.

Outside, the rain dashed against the windows, and the wind whirled round the garden in passionate gusts, swaying the trees to and fro, and rattling the windows as though it longed to burst into the room, and dash down the unnatural calm and stiffness of the man and woman sitting there.

John did all the talking, only pausing now and then whilst Miss Anne was counting her stitches. He stayed there for nearly two hours, which seemed to them both as though they would never end. And when at last he got up to leave her, it must be confessed that a very tough battle was being fought out between his sense of honour, and all the other senses that drew so forcibly in an opposite direction. But with John Mordaunt the issue of such struggles never hung long in the balance.

He kept Miss Anne's thin fingers in his, and looked down on her with his kind eyes.

"May I come back to-morrow, Nan?" he asked gravely. "There is one thing of which we have not spoken yet."

Does beauty consist only of perfect lines and glowing colour? For a moment Miss Anne's face, as she raised it transfigured by gratitude and adoration, had caught back some reflection of the girlish charm and brightness that had won John Mordaunt's heart amongst the summer isles of the South Sea.

IV.

THERE was a great storm that night, blowing straight from the Atlantic, so that the salt spray was seized up by the wind and dashed far inland over the shuddering leafage.

Miss Anne crouched over the wood-fire, and thought of the fishermen at sea, and wondered if John was in a like storm far away amongst the South Sea Islands. She could not so soon fall out of

the habit of thinking of him like this ; she felt so dull, so exhausted after the day's unusual excitement, that it was difficult to collect her thoughts. When Bidly came to say her frugal dinner was getting cold, she told her not to wait—she was not hungry—she did not want anything to-night, except perhaps a biscuit and a cup of tea later. And Bidly, who could not understand such an event as an engagement being celebrated without eating and drinking, told Jane that Miss Anne and her sweetheart had been having "words." She felt still more convinced of this when she carried in the lamp and found her mistress in the same listless attitude, and with a scared look in her eyes.

Miss Anne drew herself up when she felt the girl's gaze upon her, and spoke nervously :

"It is a terrible night, Bidly. I seem to hear the waves rolling up the coast like thunder, and the wind cuts through me. It makes me nervous. I am afraid something terrible will happen to-night, Bidly."

"Faith, miss, it's no worse than we've had many a time o' winter. Make your mind aisy thin ; why what should happen, to be sure ?"

"I feel it—I feel it," she answered, with a shudder. "There ! Listen, Bidly ! What a gust ! Oh, it is as if every tree in the garden had fallen with a crash."

"You jist frighten me, miss !" cried Bidly. "You go to bed and sleep it off, and you'll be better to-morrow, for sure."

But Miss Anne sprang up with a sharp cry, and pushed the girl from her.

"Oh, it has come, I heard it—I saw it," she moaned. "Run and see what has happened, Bidly—quick—near the eucalyptus in the garden."

Then she sank back in her chair trembling, listening eagerly to every sound ; to Bidly and Jane's bright voices as they ran, gaily chattering, out into the blustery storm ; to their quick footsteps going and coming ; and then to their whispered conversation in the hall, outside her room. She could bear it no longer, but, suddenly opening the door, stood before them, looking like a ghost.

"Och ! Miss Anne, don't look like that," exclaimed Bidly ; "sure it's nothin' to fret over."

Miss Anne interrupted her very quietly, speaking like one in a trance.

"Has the eucalyptus been blown down ?" she asked calmly.

Bidly took refuge in her native talent, and prevaricated.

"Sure, miss, is it likely ? havin' stood sich a deal of stormin' these ten years. You jist go in to the fire, and never worry about the trees, dear heart. One gone, another comes. An' it's a long-legged strip of a thing neither, with no shade to speak of."

"It has been blown down ?" repeated Miss Anne, sharply. "Answer me, Bidly."

"To be sure it has. Snapped right in its middle, an' a wonder it's stood so long; and such a lanky bit of a tree," quoth Biddy. "Faith, an' it was."

Miss Anne pressed her hand to her side as if she had been shot. For a moment she stood there, gazing straight in front of her with wide miserable eyes—looking so small and grey and narrow in that clinging grey dress; then she turned silently into her room and closed the door after her.

How cold it was! She drew her chair close up to the hearth, where the cheerful blaze had flamed itself away, and the logs burnt red and black over hot gold ashes.

She thought of the dead eucalyptus. Only yesterday it had stood in the sunshine, tall and erect as—as— Yes, she had always thought of them together. Both so tall and strong; both emblematic to her of love growing in strength through the storms of lonely years. Now it had broken; snapped in two like any other frail thing—woman's courage and man's faith; all the brave upward striving of those ten years now gone for nought.

Well, she had known it. All that evening the presentiment had been heavy upon her; ever since she had caught the look of disappointment in John's face and eyes. He would come back and claim her, and try to make her happy. But love, passion, sympathy? She knew, without understanding why, that they were gone for ever. They would be husband and wife, but their thoughts would be as far apart as their lives had been for so long. No, she, too, would be brave and save him from herself. What he loved was the pink-cheeked sunny-eyed Nan who had laughed and been young with him; and Nan had died long ago. It was only her ghost that sat there, a forlorn little old maid staring into the dying embers.

Outside in the wind and rain, the eucalyptus, smitten by a sudden storm, lay dead; and John's love was dead, and something else that was of no value to any one was passing away, too, with the night.

The wood fire had smouldered away, and the ashes lay white on the stone hearth; through a chink in the shutters crept the cold light of a pale summer dawn, falling on the motionless figure of Miss Anne, small and precise, with head slightly drooping, and the still hands primly folded for ever on her lap.

KATHERINE CARR.



IDA PFEFFER.

IN a well-to-do, but eminently commonplace, German burgher family a baby girl was born, and they baptised her in an eminently common-place way by the name of Ida. The mother was as stout, matter-of-fact a German *hausfrau* as ever ate *sauerkraut*, and she brought up the infant in a thoroughly practical, ordinary manner, until she was able to run alone. Then the unusual and the abnormal began to step into little Ida's story.

The father was a man of a very original mind ; he had peculiar ideas about most things, and most especially he had peculiar ideas about female education. How he came to choose his very prosaic mate, appears to us to be, in truth, a matter of surprise, as we look at the strangely-assorted pair ; except that the happiest marriages are sometimes the result of strongly-marked contrasts, and this husband and wife, certainly a strong contrast in character and opinion, yet proved to be a very happy and harmonious couple.

When their first little daughter was born, the father at once made up his mind that he would carry out with her all his extraordinary notions with regard to the education of women ; and the mother, though her opinions were most diametrically opposite on the subject, yet nevertheless put the girl, as soon as she could prattle, completely into his hands.

Now the system of education which Ida's father proposed to carry out with regard to her was simply this : he was resolved that she was to be brought up precisely as if she were a boy. The little girl was dressed as a boy, and was taught to join in all boys' games. She engaged in all sorts of out-of-door exercises and sports, and became expert in running and leaping. She was taught Greek and Latin, instead of music and dancing and other feminine accomplishments ; a needle was never so much as put between her fingers.

Thus things went on with little Ida till she was about ten years old, when the course of her young life was entirely changed.

The father died rather suddenly, and Ida was immediately, of course, thrown under the sole care of her mother.

No doubt the troubles of the poor lady, when left a widow, were a good deal increased by the fact that she had this anomalous being, this boy-girl, upon her hands. However, she made short work of the problem which her husband had left her ; she solved it at once in her own matter-of-fact way. She popped Ida into petticoats before the girl could look around, and set her to sweep the house, and learn to cook and to sew, according to the fashion of all German maidens of her rank and age.

But the good lady soon found to her cost that she could not cut the Gordian knot in this summary way as she had intended. It was all

very well to bid Ida to do this or that in a proper housewifely manner, but it was quite another thing to get her to do it. She had been coerced into petticoats it was true, but she still persisted in being a boy to all intents and purposes. She was forced by her mother to do all sorts of domestic offices, but never were such offices performed in a like way before. Pitchers were broken, puddings were spoiled, rents were left in luckless garments, as the recusant damsel went hither and thither in the house performing her unwilling duties; and had not her mother possessed a very large fund of firm resolution, she would have given the attempt up in thorough desperation of making her daughter into a young lady.

If the good *frau* set the girl down to study a cookery-book, she found her, when she returned to the room, deep in a volume of travels; if she beheld her on a summer afternoon sewing her sampler in the garden, and her maternal eyes rejoiced in the sight, she was sure, did she look away for a few minutes, to perceive, to her dismay, that the *fraulein* had vanished, and after some search, to see her seated on the topmost branch of a tall tree; if she left the girl trundling her mop diligently, as she fondly thought, in the front hall, she would find the pail left in the lurch, while the young lady rushed after a passing post-chaise, and indulged in all sorts of airy speculations about its inmates. In short, never was unfortunate middle-aged matron so hardly bested through the pranks of a maiden.

The civil war in the household between the mother and daughter continued some five or six years, and still the refractory damsel was unsubdued. She chose to be a boy, in spite of long skirts and braided hair. She declared stoutly that she would be one, and a boy in all her tastes, in all her aspirations, in all her habits, she remained.

Then the mother hit upon a new expedient to subjugate the unruly *fraulein*, who, notwithstanding her protestations that she was a boy, and nothing but a boy, had become a very pretty girl, with a step as light and swift as a breeze, with a form as flexible as a young willow, with eyes all alight with fancy, and mirth, and romance; she resolved that she would engage a tutor for Ida, and try the effect upon her of instruction imparted by a man.

The plan succeeded even beyond the good lady's expectation.

All at once the girl became docile, meek, womanly, and domestic. No need now to chide her for housewifely duties undone. She was the very ideal at last of the household fairy of the family, who glided from room to room working noiseless spells of order. The mother looked on with approval and delight, and congratulated herself on the result of her scheme.

For some little time the mother dreamed on tranquilly a bright, peaceful dream concerning her wondrously-transformed daughter. Then there was for her a rude awakening. As she walked one day down the most sequestered side of the large garden, she caught sight of a very unexpected vision—a vision which caused the hair under

her highly-respectable cap to stand on end with horror ; it was Ida in the arms of her tutor.

Here was the key to the mystery regarding the alteration in the girl. Love was the enchanter, who, with his magic wand, had touched the maiden and changed her in a moment. The tutor's ideal of a woman had been a sweet, modest, gracious, domestic being. The girl had loved him from the very outset of their intercourse, and at once she had moulded herself into his mode. What wonder that his heart had caught fire from the radiant eyes of his fair pupil, and they became affianced lovers almost before they knew it.

The mother, however, had very different views for her daughter's future. The tutor was poor, and his birth was obscure ; she at once forbade him the house, and commanded Ida never to speak to him again.

Then came a time of terrible anguish for the girl, whose strong nature could do nothing by halves, and she had emphatically given away her whole heart.

There is not space here to enter into the whole history of the conflict between the mother and daughter. The end of the story only concerns us. Ida at last consented to give up her lover, but at the same time she made a vow that she would accept the first suitor that came to woo her. He came quickly in the person of a doctor of law called Pfeffer, a man twice her age, and as dry as one of his own law-books. He could have been no congenial mate for a bright, impulsive, quick-witted girl, but Ida was true to her vow, and at once accepted and married him. What was in the mother's heart, when she beheld her finished work, there is no record to say.

The marriage was in every way unfortunate. Several children were born to the pair, but the affection between them did not increase ; there was no real sympathy for each other in either heart or mind. Dr. Pfeffer might have been proud of the physical attractions of his young wife, perhaps, at first, but the charm of novelty soon wore away. He was very extravagant, and moreover managed his worldly affairs extremely ill ; he got into debt, and money grew more and more scarce in the family.

The time came at length when Madame Pfeffer literally did not know how to pay for the barest necessities of life for herself and her children ; her husband left her, and behaved in a way at once cowardly and heartless.

Ida Pfeffer's conduct at this trying period was brave and noble in the extreme. She did not accuse her husband ; she maintained a dignified silence about him ; no breath of slander ever touched her reputation ; she was a devoted mother, and even went without food herself, if only her children might be fed. She looked up to God, and was tranquilly cheerful even in her sorest need.

As years went on things grew gradually brighter for Ida Pfeffer. Her husband died and she was free from a heavy chain. Her brother was able to help her with a little money; her children grew up and were all gaining their own livelihood. Then there woke within her the longing for distant travel, which for years she had repressed, and she determined to satisfy it.

Then followed that series of wonderful journeys which have signalised her name.

Comparatively without money, without any of the appliances and aids to travel, in an age when female travellers were extremely rare even in Europe, she took long voyages alone, she penetrated alone into then almost unknown lands, she dwelt alone amid savage tribes. We see her in a dense South American forest, led by an Indian guide who suddenly turns upon her, and nothing but a miracle saves her through the intervention of a passing traveller. We see her wrapping herself in her cloak and calmly lying down to sleep on the deck of a vessel in a terrible storm; we see her surrounded by a crowd of cannibals, and averting death by a well-timed joke. Approaching age and infirmities did not damp her course or her thirst for adventure. Her children implored her to rest under their loving care; the Government of her country, which for some years had recognised her as one of the most remarkable women of the age, even forbade her to leave her native land; but it was all in vain: she stole away and again engaged in some dangerous distant journey.

At length the last earthly wandering came for Ida Pfeffer. According to her usual plan of concealing her projected travels, she slipped away one day from her family and took ship for Madagascar, which island at that time was in a very disturbed state. A queen reigned there who was peculiarly hostile to Europeans. She seized Madame Pfeffer, together with a few more travellers, and put them into close confinement. For some time they lingered in an unhealthy prison, with the fear of death hanging over their heads; but they were at last liberated, and Ida Pfeffer and her companions enjoyed once more freedom and safety.

These blessings, however, came too late for the courageous old traveller. Her health had been shattered by the hardships and suspense of that rigorous confinement in that trying climate. She journeyed back to her native land and died peacefully in the arms of her son. She has left for herself a fair chapter in the history of woman.

ALICE KING.

THE SILVER THIMBLES.

BY GEORGE FOSBERY.

YES, sir, I am a "universal provider" on a very large scale, and I am prepared to supply you at short notice with everything you can possibly require from your cradle to your grave. I am speaking literally. Metaphor is the one thing in which the interests of my business will not permit me to deal.

With regard to cradles, you can be suited at our establishment with anything from a Size 1, Untrimmed, Black Japanned, Full-height second quality Child's Cot at 17s. 6d., less five per cent. discount for cash, to a Size 2, Trimmed, 39 inch Infant's Bassinette up to any price in Black, Cream, and gold, with Pink, Sky, Cardinal, and Cream netting.

And, as to graves, we have just now a remarkably nice assortment. Eh!—what's the matter? Wandering from the point, was I? So I was. Really, I must ask you to excuse me!

I need hardly tell you that my wife, Mrs. Brownlow, is very much looked up to in our neighbourhood, and that we are admitted into the very best society. We know this, because we are on visiting terms with Mrs. Frumpington Beade, and she told us herself she was very particular, which at once put us at our ease.

Well, as I was going to say, we were invited a while ago to Mrs. Frumpington Beade's private theatricals, for which we supplied the scenery and dresses, and the music; and there I was introduced to one of the prettiest women I ever came across in my life; and *that* is saying a good deal.

Mrs. Hurlingham, the lovely lady in question, made herself very agreeable to me. After the theatrical performance she led me away to a quiet corner behind a screen in the back balcony. She asked me all about my business, and took the greatest interest in everything I told her. By way of interesting her still more, I alluded to the romantic side of my occupation. She was immensely entertained by my description of some of the tricks played by monomaniacs and the light-fingered gentry of London upon our customers and upon ourselves.

"Many a clever shop-lifter," I said, "is for all the world a real lady like yourself."

"Like me!" exclaimed pretty Mrs. Hurlingham, mistaking what I had said.

I hastened to correct the impression.

"Yes, like you; that is to say—ahem!—as beautiful as you, Mrs. Hurlingham; that is to say, not quite so!"

I flatter myself this was rather neat. Mrs. H. must have thought so too, for it made her laugh.

"I have heard something of the kind before in Paris," she said.

"Ah, Paris!" I repeated. "That reminds me that we received a warning a day or two ago from the French police against a very artful woman of this kind who has come over here for change of air, and scene."

"What is she like?" inquired charming Mrs. Hurlingham.

"What is she like?" I echoed; and then I saw my chance for another bit of smartness. "Like, why, her description might do for you—ahem! Tall, elegant figure, stylishly dressed, possessed of considerable personal charms and most fascinating address."

Mrs. Hurlingham again laughed heartily at my sally. It was rather a smart one, wasn't it? Just as well Mrs. Brownlow was down at supper!

"Do these—a—thieves ever get punished?" asked my fair companion, with a wicked little smile.

"Always," I replied, "in the end!"

"I suppose you mean that they invariably fall into the hands of the police?" she said.

"Not exactly," I replied. "We seldom prosecute. It would injure our reputation. For petty pilferers it is almost enough when they are found out in the act. I have known the shock of discovery cure more than one before now. Their conscience punishes them severely."

"Then you believe in Nemesis, Mr. Brownlow?"

I didn't know what Nemesis was; it wasn't in our catalogue. I believe it is an Egyptian mummy, and I'd guarantee to get one if you'd give me the favour of your esteemed order. So I said:

"Of course! I believe in Nemesis down to the ground."

"What," she continued, "do you really think retribution is bound to overtake the unscrupulous, however skilful they may be?"

"Bound to," I said. "You might as well doubt that honesty is the best policy. It is by always selling a good article and by strict attention to business that I have become a rich man." I said this with pardonable pride, but I regret to say it did not impress Mrs. Hurlingham as much as it ought to have done. She looked at me somewhat coldly, and said:

"I thought 'shoddy' goods and 'overworking employés' were the royal road to wealth in these days!"

Though I am not exactly thin-skinned, this remark of hers hurt me. It was spiteful, though it did not apply in the least to me. John Brownlow sells nothing but the best, or second-best, articles; and he never keeps his shop-girls standing more than ten hours a day.

"Come, come," added Mrs. Hurlingham, when she saw that I didn't care for chaff on such a subject: "I didn't mean to offend

you, Mr. Brownlow! You won't turn me out of your premises when I come there shopping, will you?" And she smiled sweetly.

"Not for worlds, ma'am—not for worlds. You shall have anything you like at cost price, if you will send in your card to my private room."

I was just finishing my sentence, in as courteous and confidential a manner as I could assume, consistently with my being a married man, you understand, when I became aware of the presence of a third party at the *tête-à-tête*. My wife had come suddenly round the screen.

Mrs. Brownlow didn't say anything, but I thought it best to make my bow to Mrs. Hurlingham.

"Time to go, my dear; is it?" I asked calmly of Mrs. Brownlow.

"High time!" she replied, very stiffly, as we moved away. "And pray, Mr. Brownlow, what is Mrs. Hurlingham going to send her card into your private room for?"

I needn't trouble you, gentle reader, with the ready explanation I gave. It is beneath a man of my standing to prevaricate. I told her the truth. You would believe that I told the truth. I am sure my wife didn't.

"And perhaps you'll be good enough to inform me who this fascinating young woman is?" resumed Mrs. Brownlow as we drove home in our comfortable brougham.

"I overheard, my dear, that she was the wife of Her Majesty's Third Secretary of Legation at some place or other abroad."

"Oh, John!" exclaimed my better-half, softening. "Why didn't you say so sooner? Her Majesty's Third Secretary of what did you say?"

"Legation, my love, Legation."

"Her Majesty's—well, there now! I knew Mrs. Frumpington Beade was very particular. Do you think I could call, John, and ask this Mrs. Hurlingham to dinner?"

"I shall be delighted—that is—I mean—I've no doubt you could, dear, if you set your mind to it."

Mrs. Brownlow did set her mind to it, and in a very short time we (that is my wife, of course) became very friendly with handsome Mrs. Hurlingham.

Meantime Mrs. Hurlingham came to be a constant visitor to Brownlow's Emporium. Sometimes she sent in her card and paid me a visit in my sanctum—strictly on business, as I need hardly say.

One day Mrs. Hurlingham sent in her card in the usual way, and was shown into my room. She looked pale and nervous. She was evidently distressed about something. As soon as she was seated she began to say, in hesitating tones, that she was in pecuniary difficulties, and that her husband was unable to send her as much money as usual from abroad. I was not to mistake her. She did not intend to borrow money. But she had some little trinkets of her own,

wedding presents, she said, for which she was anxious to obtain the full value in cash. Would I help her?

I reflected for an instant. It was obviously inconvenient that a private transaction of this sort should be carried out in my own jewellery department. It might—I merely thought it might—lead to some misunderstanding, if not scandal.

It occurred to me that I had half-an-hour to spare, a thing that had never happened to me during business hours for twenty years. I undertook her commission to dispose of the trinkets; and after handing me a little packet of rings and brooches, she expressed an amount of gratitude which I would rather Mrs. Brownlow knew nothing about. She left me, after saying she would call again on the following morning.

I took a hansom to Bond Street, and astonished my old friends Bangle and Son, the celebrated silversmiths, by paying them a morning visit. Without giving them any particulars, I told them that a friend of mine had asked me to dispose of the little packet of jewellery. They gave me a liberal sum for the parcel, and I was on the point of departing, when I noticed a tray of Indian silver thimbles, perhaps a score or so, on the counter.

"How do you sell these?" I asked out of pure curiosity, knowing we had the same article, ticketed one-and-elevenpence-three-farthings, at the Emporium.

"Half-a-crown," answered Mr. Bangle senior.

I took up one of the thimbles and looked at it. To my surprise I found that it bore on the inside our own private mark.

"Where did you get these?" I inquired, showing as little embarrassment as possible.

"A lady brought them here and pestered us till we bought them," replied Mr. Bangle junior.

"What! all the twenty?" I exclaimed.

"Yes," explained Mr. Bangle senior. "She said she had expressed a wish for an Indian silver thimble, and her friends played her a practical joke by each giving her one on her birthday. She was so angry, that she wanted to sell them all."

"Strange!" I mused. "And what was the lady like?"

I had become inquisitive.

"Tall," said Mr. Bangle senior.

"And good-looking—very good-looking," said Mr. Bangle junior, with a laugh.

"Stylishly dressed," added the elder Mr. B.

"Very elegant figure," added his son.

An awkward misgiving seized me. I was afraid to say anything more.

"Good-day, and thank you," I said, hurrying away.

"Good-day, Mr. Brownlow, and thank *you*," rejoined Messrs. Bangle and Son in a breath.

As soon as I was back again in my sanctum, I sent for the manager of our jewellery department.

"Oh—ah—by the way, Mr. Stone—have you missed anything from your counter lately?"

"Yes, sir," replied my subordinate; "I am sorry to say we have. It isn't much, and I should have mentioned it sooner, but we only discovered the loss in stock-taking this morning."

"Go on, sir," I said anxiously.

"There is a deficit of twenty Indian silver thimbles, sir. They cannot have been taken all at once without our notice. It must have been done by degrees."

"Do you suspect anybody?"

"I have no evidence to go upon, sir."

"It is not any of your staff?" I asked.

"Certainly not, sir. They are all tried men."

"Then they must have been abstracted by some person who constantly visits your counter. Have you any such person in your mind?"

"The only customer who comes to us often, sir, is the lady that sends her card in to you—a friend of yours, I believe, sir. She brings us some trifling repairs to do nearly every day. Mrs. Hurlingham, I think her name is."

For a moment I turned dizzy. Suspicion must be diverted from that quarter immediately.

"Yes," I said, sternly, "Mrs. Hurlingham is a friend of mine. She is incapable of taking the thimbles."

"Certainly," assented my manager.

"That will do for to-day. You will use the customary precautions to prevent a recurrence of this, if possible. By the way: bring me a tray of these thimbles, and leave it here. I should like to have a good look at them."

"Yes, sir."

"And—just send me Mr. Coil, the manager of the Electrical Department."

* * * * *

When Mrs. Hurlingham called next morning, I caused her to be shown into my room, and I received her with my customary manner.

I handed over to her the proceeds of the sale of her trinkets, and again she loaded me with expressions of heartfelt gratitude, and so on.

When she rose to go, I remained at my desk, instead of advancing to show her out.

Near the door stood a table, and on the table lay the tray of Indian silver thimbles which I had ordered Mr. Stone to bring to me the previous day.

Between me and this table Mrs. Hurlingham suddenly halted. I pretended to be occupied with the papers on my desk. She leant

one hand on the table, very near to the place where the thimbles lay, and then she turned towards me once more.

"Mr. Brownlow—you have done me a great service, and I am—Oh! what is this? help! I am dying!"

She had started violently, and almost fallen to the ground. I did not move, though she staggered a couple of paces forward, as one who is shot.

"No, Mrs. Hurlingham, you are not dying. There is nothing the matter, unless it is with your conscience."

"What do you mean!" she exclaimed in an agony of fright.

"You will remember," I said, "my telling you at our first meeting that retribution inevitably overtakes those who deserve it."

"Nemesis!" she gasped.

"Yes," I replied, "Nemesis, Rameses—anything you like to call it. You have had one warning to-day, evidently. Don't tempt me to repeat it. Hadn't you better return to *Paris* for your health."

The miserable woman turned as pale as a ghost. I struck my hand bell. A porter entered.

"Show this lady into a hansom, and send Mr. Coil here." The porter obeyed. Mrs. Hurlingham went out without a word.

Two minutes later the manager of the Electrical Department entered the room.

"Please to disconnect that current from the silver thimbles, Mr. Coil, and take the apparatus away."

"Yes, sir."

"And by the way, as I said before, be careful to say nothing about it to anybody."

You will be glad to know that Mrs. Hurlingham left England hurriedly for the Continent. She is not likely to trouble us again. But Mrs. Brownlow, who knows nothing of all this, never ceases to regret the absence of the wife of one of Her Gracious Majesty's Third Secretaries of Legation.



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THERE, IN A SMALL RECESS, WITH A CURTAIN HALF-DRAWN BEFORE IT, WAS THE
STATUE OF RUTH, GLEANING.